

+Raymond Blazek -- June 8, 2020

A word that kept coming up in today's scriptures is the word "everyone." "Everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness through his name." "It is the will of my Father that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life." It is in fact one of central beliefs of our Christian faith that God has created each person for eternal life and that Jesus by his death and resurrection has broken the chains of sin and death that bound humanity.

Everyone's life is important to God and deeply matters to God. Each one of us was created for a personal relationship with God. Jesus was sent and gave his life that each one of us would have that personal relationship with God restored for eternity. That is what most of heard in our churches this past Sunday in the Gospel -- "that God sent his Son not to condemn the world, but that all might be saved through him."

These days too – all around the world people in response to the unjust discrimination and death of +George Floyd are reminding us that "Black lives matter" and that every life matters.

Today as we come together for the funeral of our brother +Raymond I believe we are reminded also that everyone's life matters and matters deeply to God even though we may not always see that or appreciate that.

As I looked over the obituary again and the notes I took from his family in the review we did of his life, there was, on the surface, really nothing in his life that would make the headlines of a newspaper. He was born and raised on a farm near Greenbush – middle child of a family of seven children. He did not go that far in schooling. He helped his family on the farm and did a little farming himself. Then he went to work on the railroad along with men from the local community maintaining the rail lines for 33 years – a work that he seemed to truly enjoy. . (That was the main point that people might make in summarizing his life – that he worked for 33 years

for the railroad.) After that he retired to his local property and did odds and ends until his health failed and he passed away at age 84 – three days shy of making 85.

On the surface there was generally nothing that significant about +Raymond's life. When I first came to serve this parish, I would always see him at Mass sitting on the right side towards the back of the church but I hardly knew anything about him, but I saw that he was well-accepted and interacted the other parishioners.

However, when he became ill with his cancer and other issues that made it difficult for him to come to church I was asked or perhaps even invited by him to make a visit to him. It was then that I began to learn about the deeper things of his life.

Jesus over and over reminds us not to judge anyone actions for good or bad because only God sees into the heart. As one spiritual speaker said, "Jesus was obsessed about the heart." Jesus said that it was not what went into a person that made them good or bad, but what came out of the heart and what mattered was the intentions of their heart behind their actions.

Anyway, what I learned from that good visit with +Raymond and a couple of other visits with him was that there was a lot going on the heart of +Raymond – a lot going on that most of us could not have known unless we would have spent more time with him and he would have shared more of his thoughts with us.

A couple of lines that we heard in today's scriptures were that God wills that nothing would be lost and that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and that God wills to raise us all up to the eternal life for which we were made and not just for this life.

One of the first things that I learned and that +Raymond humbly shared with me in my visits with him was that he and God had a deep personal relationship. Today's reading spoke of the graces that come to all who believe in God and I believe that +Raymond was always a believer from an early age

on, but I know that in these last years he was a complete believer in God having been helped by God through the blessing of different religious experiences that God had given to him.

Unless we knew and visited with +Raymond, we would not have known what a deep faith he had and how thankful he was for his faith. +Raymond basically had a prayer corner in his home with various spiritual pictures and objects – some of which are on the table at the church entrance. He had a very serious prayer ritual that he went through each day with a deep examination of his conscience. He was very grateful for the spiritual help of the Blessed Virgin Mary in his life and had a personal relationship with her. He always attended Sunday Mass when he could and these last days waited for Phyllis, his cousin to bring Holy Communion to him each Sunday or each week. This and much more were part of +Raymond's spiritual life.

The point of my lifting up all this is to remind us all that while a person's life may look rather ordinary on the surface or outside, God has or wants to have a great deal going on with each one of us.

Nothing separated +Raymond from the love of God. And nothing was lost to God in and through the life of +Raymond. It may not have gotten that much attention, but his presence and care for his mother after his father's death made a big difference in her life and sustained her. Because of him, his sister +Helen, who died so young at the age of 13, and the gift of her life to him and their family was never forgotten (he always spoke of her). His relationship and care for +Alice his companion in these later years kept her from being lost and forgotten or ignored in her differentness. So while +Raymond's life may have seemed insignificant on the surface, God was doing much in his life and through life that made a great difference.

Today we lift up our thanks to God for the blessings that came to us and so many others through his life.

We thank God for the blessing he was to his family, to the railroad crew that he worked with all those years, to the friends that enjoyed his company and their shared activities, and to +Alice and her needs.

We thank God for the joy of gardening and hunting and fishing that +Raymond shared with us and all the things that he fixed that we might have tossed away. We thank God for his military service and his contributions to the communities he lived in and to his parish communities.

Let us thank God above all for the witness of his life of faith, not perfect, yet pleasing to God. We thank God for the example of faith that he was to other men and is for us men today. His witness that men can have deep spiritual lives and can openly talk about and live out their faith.

We thank God for all the blessings and care (seen and unseen) that he poured out on our brother +Raymond in his life, and we thank God for the fullness of eternal life that he has led our brother +Raymond to now in his death.

May a deeper appreciation of how God worked in and through +Raymond's life help us to be more open as he was to the wonderful love and graces that God wants to share with everyone who believes in him and in Jesus whom he sent to us.