



DIOCESE OF FAIRBANKS

1316 Peger Road • Fairbanks, Alaska • 99709 • 907-374-9500 • Fax: 907-374-9580

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

9 December 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

My father passed into the hands of our merciful God at 8:56pm on December 8, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Our Lady answered my prayer that she take him to her Son on this most beautiful feast day.

Many of you know that my father had a major brain bleed in June 2009. The end result was that he was placed in a care facility in Alpena, Michigan. My mother faithfully visited him daily when possible. During the past 11-year period, his condition gradually declined as predicted by his neurologist.

In mid-March 2020 with the onset of COVID-19, the nursing facility, like many across our nation, implemented strict COVID protocol measures which restricted any family member from visiting him in person. At best, there was a window visit via a phone chat. My mother would stand by the window and talk to him on the phone. He would set the phone down and motion for her to come in. For her, this was as torturous as Mary standing at the foot of the Cross and watching her Son suffer. We all made attempts to call him on the phone and chat. We noticed that his condition was significantly declining as he was isolated from human contact of family and friends. I fully recognize and respect caution, care and concern regarding viruses. I deeply urge those of you reading these words, if you have any influence on the system of care, that something be done to mitigate human suffering (lack of touch) in this regard. It seems more deadly and widely spread than the virus itself.

Last Wednesday, December 2, we found out that my father tested positive for COVID along with several staff and residents of his care home. Given the fact the medical system in Northern Michigan is overwhelmed with COVID patients, it was determined he would be transferred to a care facility in Traverse City, MI (2 1/2 hours from our home). He was placed in a COVID isolation unit along with several others from around the state and two from Ohio. Due to a very lengthy explanation, my father could no longer retain food (via a PEG line) and hydration was causing many other issues. He was placed on hospice care. I was contacted in Fairbanks, Alaska and the hospice nurse explained kindly but bluntly that my father was dying. I boarded a flight late on the night of December 4 to arrive in Traverse City at midnight, December 5. I prayed to Our Lady to intercede for him and asked if it were God's will to keep him here. I was able to offer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, give him a small piece of Holy Communion, and bestow the Apostolic Pardon upon him (profoundly humbling for a priest to do this for his father). The nurse at the facility indicated she thought he might have a few days but that all was in God's hands to determine his time left. I humbly asked Our Lady to grant him the favor for her intercession to be taken to the merciful hands of her Son on her Feast Day of the Immaculate Conception.

I thought after administering these sacraments that I would be asked to leave and not return due to the fact he was in a COVID wing. He was placed in an isolated room, and my sister and I were permitted to visit him with all the proper protective gear. He never manifested any COVID symptoms. I was deeply appreciative of the staff to let myself and my sister be at his side, Sunday thru Tuesday, for this journey of the Agony of the Cross. My mother and other family members joined us in these visits via FaceTime. As much as I detest the craziness of smart phones and social media, I saw the power of this directly impact family in a positive way during a critical time of need.

As many of you who have stood at the side of a dying person, you see the ups and downs of their last struggling moments. We could tell as his breathing slowed that the end of his earthly journey was near. During his last moments, I prayed the prayers for the dying, the prayer of commendation, the rosary and Apostolic pardon. As I

was reading John 14: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places... I will come back and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” At the conclusion of these words, he literally took his last breath. I looked at my sister and her eyes were wide opened and her mouth. We never doubted God’s power, but we were struck to the core of our soul at this crescendo of the symphony of life of Don Zielinski, our beloved father and dear husband to our mother. Like the three magi who encountered Christ at his birth and went home a different route, my sister and I encountered Christ and left different people, powerfully changed by this sacred encounter of Christ’s passion, death and resurrection.

My father’s funeral Mass will be celebrated on Saturday, December 12, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Our Lady keeps coming through) 11am at All Saints Church in Alpena, Michigan. The funeral Mass will be Live Streamed, <https://alpenacatholics.org/>, for those who desire to attend via the virtual world.

My father and mother were actively involved in the local St. Vincent de Paul ministry for over 40 years. My father’s obituary photo of years back reflects a radiant smile with a missing tooth which he declared, “why get it fixed when the money could be given to the poor.” More than anything we ask for prayers for the souls in purgatory, those suffering in isolation in nursing homes and dying of COVID. If you desire to make a gift offering please check out St. Vincent de Paul in Alpena, MI at <https://www.stvincentdepaulalpena.com/how-we-help-the-community> or All Saints Catholic Church <https://alpenacatholics.org/>. Due to COVID restrictions and my father’s burning desire to help the poor, please do not send flowers.

Sincerely in Christ,



†Most Reverend Chad W. Zielinski
Catholic Bishop of Northern Alaska
Diocese of Fairbanks



CWZ/las