

The Triumph of a Catholic Death

Dear Parishioners,

I would like to thank you for all the Mass cards & other kind displays of support upon the death of my brother Stephen, who passed away on July 8th at the age of 62. I know that many of you have already suffered the sorrowful loss of a sibling. I now join your mournful ranks.

Please indulge me for choosing this space to pay my brother tribute. It seems fitting to me, especially since he was the brother of a priest. In fact, I would say that he played an important part in setting my foot upon the path to the altar.

My brother was one of my heroes in life. He had an irrepressible goodness and sense of humor about him which the trials of life could never overcome. In his professional life as an attorney he had a sterling reputation for excellence, honor and integrity.

Most importantly, however, my brother was a Catholic gentleman whose beliefs never wavered from his fidelity to Holy Mother Church. Fifteen years my senior, he was one of my principle teachers in the Faith when I was young. Never ignoring his kid brother, he used to read me stories from the Bible on his knee when I was a little boy. During my teen years he gave me focus by impressing upon me the necessity of making an adult decision to embrace the One, True Faith. He taught me the value of the Holy Rosary and the importance of a filial love for the Blessed Virgin.

He also understood well the redemptive value of suffering. We had had many discussions through the years about this essential key to Christian spirituality, and when he began his own "passion" which lasted perhaps three years, intensifying in his last six months and then his final week, he showed me by his example what it means for a real Christian to take up his cross daily to follow Christ.

Throughout his life my brother cultivated a devotion to Saint Joseph - the Patron of a Happy Death - and I believe he was rewarded for all this, for he passed away peacefully with his loved ones about him, wearing the Brown Scapular of Our Lady, in the full embrace of the Church, with all the benefits of the Sacraments and having received the Apostolic Pardon and Viaticum.

My family kept a continual prayer vigil at his bedside for those last days - an outpouring of love, honor and respect. Forever on my soul will be etched the memory of the tender last farewell my 88 year old mother bid him before he passed away.

As I stood beside his bed to bless and say the prayers for the dead I could not help but consider that the various medical procedures he had endured left their own "nail marks," if you will, on his body, in further, final imitation of Christ.

And in bittersweet confirmation that life is greater than death, a scant seven hours later my brother's first grandchild was born early in the very same hospital where he passed away - a baby girl given the name Gianna Stefania in tribute.

My brother also understood the mystery and mercy of Purgatory, clearly expressing to me his desire that Masses be said for his soul. While it would be impious not to have supreme confidence in the benefits of our Holy Religion towards the salvation of our souls, at the same time the judgment of the deepest recesses of a man's soul is the Divine Prerogative alone. Thus the necessity of prayers for the deceased, even those who died in the Embrace. And if our loved one's spiritual purification was already or is now complete, the merit and application of our prayers are left to God's Providence, never to be considered fruitless.

But undoubtedly his was a triumphal Catholic death come at the end of a worthy Catholic life. My dear brother, whom Almighty God called early from this valley of tears, understood and lived fully the manly virtue of Religion. Thus I salute him and thank God for the blessings He bestowed upon him, even as my heart aches and my thoughts turn to Heaven.

-Father de Rosa