

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Nov 2nd 2015

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed

There is a Mexican saying that we die three deaths: the first when our bodies die, the second when our bodies are lowered into the earth out of sight, and the third when our loved ones forget us. Catholics forestall that last death by seeing the faithful dead as members of the communion of saints which is the body of Christ consisting of members both alive and deceased, all alive in Christ. And power comes from the prayers of this communion of saints which we celebrate today on this feast of All Souls Day, November 2nd.

My own father died when I was 23 years old. It has been almost 25 years ago now. And I really relate to that saying about the three deaths. My dad died of terminal cancer and I was not present the moment he died. He was expected live 6 weeks longer but slipped away unexpectedly during the night while I was still away at college. I so much wanted to be there - to be holding his hand.

I fully experienced and will never forget the pain of that "second" death - seeing the casket lowered into the ground on a cool windy autumn day. I tear up just picturing it in mind almost 25 years later.

And the third death. Almost twenty five years later, so few people in our tight-knit community remember him. Hard to believe. Just last month I ran into a man I had never met before who was a professional colleague of my dad's and who remembered him very fondly. I can hardly describe how powerful it is for me when I meet someone who remembers my dad these days. As the years go on it happens less and less.

And yet the remembering is powerful, and so is the prayer. My faith tells me that I still have influence through my prayers when it comes to my dad and all the members of the communion of saints. The story is not over. Honestly I do not understand how this dynamic of prayer for the dead really works. But I believe and I pray. I ask my dad for his prayers for me, especially on tough days and I pray for him. As my three sons have gotten older we have started to routinely read the lives of the saints out loud as a family. It amazes me how often in these stories the prayers for intercession to the various saints have been answered in wondrous ways throughout history. I feel proud to be connected to a tradition that honors these holy men and women who still seem to have influence on our earthly lives, mysterious though it is.

The Psalm for today is the famous Psalm 23 which is so often chosen as prayer at wake services and funeral Masses. How many times have we gathered as a tearful grieving community with tissues in hand and spoken those words together, "The Lord is my shepherd, There is nothing I shall want."

When we prayed this Psalm at my dad's wake service I remember saying the words aloud dutifully but in my heart following with "But God you know that what I really want is my Dad back." As those early days of grieving waged on, my desire for having my dad back didn't change, but the ability to allow the Lord to be my shepherd in the ups and downs became stronger and gave me focus and healing in the grief.

My dad lived and died believing in Jesus Christ and hoping in the words of Jesus from today's Gospel, "that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him up on

the last day." (John 6:40) I am so grateful to be together with my dad and with you as a part of the communion of saints, living and dead, who believe in the power of Jesus Christ to raise us up on the last day.

Kathy Martin-Creighton University's Campus Ministry Department