

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jun 7th 2017

I have never been to such a dark place in my life that, like Tobit and Sarah, I wanted to die. Both had experienced such grief and sorrow that living any longer just didn't seem worth it. Sarah even pondered suicide. However, they both trusted in God and prayed to him and things changed. God heard their cry and sent his healing angel to intercede for them.

When I was very young, the grocer in our little one horse town committed suicide. I had the childish notion that this was a one-way ticket to everlasting torment. Yet, even as a child, I remember hearing my parents talk about how he had been in such pain, had been on some strong drugs, and appeared to be "out of his head" when he pulled the trigger. My parents were adamant about doing nothing to damage our bodies which were made in the image of God and, by virtue of our baptism, had become temples of the Holy Spirit. That meant no booze, no smoking, and doing anything that could put our lives in jeopardy for thrill seeking. They wouldn't have used the term but they were thoroughly pro-life. Thus, it came as quite a shock to me that they had nothing but compassion for the grocer and especially his family. They taught me early on not to make judgments that were not mine to make. It made me wonder what must have been happening in the soul of the joyful, loving grocer that he would do what he did.

My wife has an aunt who has recently begun to pray as Tobit did. She just wants to die. Her children are shocked. "I'm not afraid to die," she says, "and I've been here long enough." She keeps falling, having medical issues which leave her comatose for many days, and then she recovers and goes through the same trials again and again. I seem to remember hearing that Mother Teresa said something similar at the end of her life; I've accomplished everything the Lord wanted and now it's time for me to move on, or words to that effect.

People of faith surely look at death in a unique way. I am reminded of the words of two deacons. Deacon Rob was in his fifties when he had such serious life-threatening issues that death appeared imminent. His response? "Well, I don't know why he would, but Jesus can have me, if he wants me." The other, 39-year-old Presbyterian Deacon General Stonewall Jackson, of civil war fame, upon hearing that he was hours from death responded to his wife with, "I always wanted to die on a Sunday." His men often joked that General Jackson believed in the Providence of God and bayonets, perhaps not necessarily in that order. One thing was certain: he was not afraid to die.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the resurrection and the life, says the Lord;

whoever believes in me will never die.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,
and the God of Jacob?

He is not God of the dead but of the living.

My prayer is that we might have this type of living hope. Jesus is risen. Those who believe in him will never die. Even the dead – live! Alleluia, Alleluia.

George Butterfield-Creighton University's Law School Library