

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Aug 7th 2018

It is hard to believe that one year has passed since my precious mother became ill with an intense upper respiratory infection which rapidly developed into pneumonia. Recently I ran across many of the texts we (her eight children) sent to one another during that difficult time. Our messages were filled with deep concern as we searched for ways to provide comfort and relief for her while working tirelessly with her physician and other health care providers to uncover the medication or treatment which would restore her health. As I read those texts, I recalled the urgent fear which accompanied the understanding that our 93 year old mother faced a long, difficult and perhaps impossible fight. Our fears were confirmed because she never fully recovered and died three months later.

Our mother was always the person who helped and guided us when we faced the fears of life. From our childhood challenges and into adulthood, she was there to comfort, console and stand in solidarity with us every step of the way. It was hard to imagine (and often still is) a world without her.

In today's Gospel, we read about fear as experienced by the Disciples. They sat offshore in a boat while Jesus went up on the mountain by himself to pray. The boat...was being tossed about by the waves...During the fourth watch of the night, (Jesus) came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified....and they cried out in fear...At once Jesus spoke to them, 'Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Their leader, mentor, faithful companion and friend was there to provide solace. Peter was so encouraged by the presence of Jesus that he tried to walk on the water toward Jesus but his fear overcame his courage and ... Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him. Those in the boat who witnessed the actions of Jesus proclaimed, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

As we prepared for my mother's wake and funeral I couldn't imagine that I would be able to speak during her services. I was afraid that I would break down and so I turned to prayer. During my prayer a beautiful memory emerged of how my mother sang the Ave Maria at her mother's funeral. There was not a dry eye during our grandmother's funeral as all who gathered listened to a grieving daughter sing farewell to her mother. Mom told me later that in spite of her fear of weeping, she knew that was what Grandma would have wanted.

Over the years, our mother's incredible soprano voice filled our home and countless churches throughout the Midwest. In spite of her innate introversion, she embraced her gift and was able to stand in front of hundreds and collectively thousands of people in her lifetime touching their souls with her music. If she could overcome her fears, I would overcome mine. The night of the wake, I felt my mother's presence as I looked out over the crowded church. My fear was gone. Yes, I wept while I spoke but I was no longer afraid of my tears.

The following day during her funeral liturgy, we listened to the Ave Maria played as a violin solo. To honor her, there was no vocalist...only the plaintive sound of the violin. We felt her presence as she, Mary and Jesus reached out to us. Our grieving hearts heard them whisper together, Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.

