

55 years ago this month, my mother lost a bet to my father. The Yankees were slated to play the Pittsburgh Pirates in the World Series, and the Yankees were heavily favored. My father had been pressuring my mother to go out with him, and my mother told him she'd only go out with him if the underdog Pirates could do the unthinkable and actually beat the Yankees.

Now keep in mind that my father had asked out my mother before and had stood her up, so my mother wasn't being heartless. She simply was doing what any self-respecting woman would do. But on October 13, 1960, in the bottom of the 9<sup>th</sup> inning of Game 7, with the game tied 9-9, Bill Mazeroski hit the game-winning homerun that secured both a World Series trophy for the Pirates, and a date for my dad.

A year later, on October 7, 1961, my parents were married. And what a beautiful marriage it's been. Over the years as we've grown up, my siblings and I have come to understand what a special marriage our parents enjoyed...54 years' worth of beautiful marital love, a love that now finds its expression in the sharp pain that we feel at Pop's loss. We hurt right now because my parents loved each other so very much and, in turn, loved each of us so tenderly. Love comes at a cost, and today we must pay the bill.

In his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of how while we live here on earth, we see "indistinctly, as in a mirror," but that in eternity we will see God face to face. Because we cannot see God while we live on earth but must rely on our faith to "see" Him, we cannot know God fully in this life. However, the blessed in Heaven – in seeing God face to face – thus know Him fully, just as God knows us fully.

This seeing of God fully that is reserved for the just in Heaven is what we Christians call the Beatific Vision. So in our Christian tradition, Heaven is understood not simply as a place where we spend eternity with our Lord, but it is a state in which we see and know God as He truly is, for the Beatific Vision is the full and direct self-revelation of God to an individual soul...it is the Bridegroom revealing Himself to His bride.

As men and women created in God's image and likeness, the Beatific Vision is our final end in which alone will we find total and perfect happiness. God has created us for Himself, and thus we pass our lives here on earth with a longing deep within us: a longing to see Him and to be in union with Him – a longing that is often unnamed and even more often misinterpreted as a desire that can be sated by the mammon of this world. But only God Himself can fulfill this longing within each of us, and it is only totally fulfilled when we behold Him face to face, in all His splendor and majesty.

One of my dad's best attributes was his clear blue eyes. Dad had eyes that were not just physically beautiful; they were true and sincere and full of warmth. Dad had good eyes, and as the son of an artist, Dad's eyes were naturally trained to see all that is beautiful in this world. In fact, some of my fondest memories of Pop are of those times when he would marvel at whatever

beautiful sight was before him, whether it was a peaceful sunset, majestic mountains, the rolling sea, a Gothic cathedral, or a work of art.

Dad loved all that is good, and true, and beautiful in this world. Whether he knew it or not, in beholding and admiring all that is true, good, and beautiful in this world, Dad was communing with God and actually preparing Himself for that Beatific vision we hope he now enjoys.

Of course the greatest beauty of Dad's life was my lovely mother, and one of the things that I will miss the most is seeing how Dad beheld Mom with such great love and held her hand with such great tenderness. He would also flirt with her shamelessly, but I doubt God holds that against him!

Of course Dad's greatest joy was being with her and with his family. And with us he was, through all of the activities of our growing up years: scout meetings, baseball games, football games, track meets, band and orchestra concerts, and school plays...through it all, Dad was always there as our biggest cheerleader. And not only was he with us encouraging us and cheering us on, with sports and scouting he even took over as coach or Cub master! If we played well, he gave us high praise, and if we struck out or missed a tackle, he always consoled us with his encouragement.

In his desire to be a worthy husband and a provident father, Dad showed what a true, good, and beautiful man he was: honest, kind, morally upright, and generous...always quick to help, always faithful to his duties, always wanting the best for his family. Of course Dad was by no means perfect. He was marked by the sin of Adam, just like we all are. But Dad was not a man who was defined by his faults and failings. All who knew him, knew him by his goodness. Several years ago during one of my visits home, Mom, Dad and I were walking down Washington Street in downtown Indianapolis when a man dressed as a cook came running out toward us yelling, "Sergeant Reid, Sergeant Reid!" When he caught up to us, he introduced himself to Mom and me as one of Dad's former inmates in the prison. He thanked Dad and credited Dad for helping him get his life back on track. During his years in prison, Dad mentored this man, and he never forgot the lessons Dad had taught him. And now he's got a job and is doing well for himself. I was so very proud of my Dad in that moment...proud, but not a bit surprised. Dad was always a coach, always a mentor.

Of course while we could talk for hours about Pop and all the good he did in this life, a Christian funeral is really more about what Christ has done for us. For no matter how much good one has done in this world, in truth we all go to Judgment Day with empty hands. For it is not our good works that save us, but only God's grace and mercy.

That's not to say that our good works are unimportant. Indeed, St. James tells us that good works are a measure of our faith in God! Our good works in this life prepare us for the next life by forming us in virtue. They help us to become more like God, and in becoming more like God, we come to desire Him and His grace and mercy all the more. Truly, by being merciful to others – in little ways or big – we assure ourselves of receiving God's mercy when our time comes.

And that's the key: God's mercy. For if we have that, we have everything. More than celebrating Dad's life today, we are here to celebrate God's great mercy – and to put our trust in

it. By suffering for our sins, dying on the Cross, and rising again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, Jesus has opened to us the gates to Heaven. He has conquered sin and even death itself. As Jesus tells us, He is “the Resurrection and the life; whoever believes in [Him], even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in [Him] will never die.” The good news is that Dad was a believer!

So, for Christians, death is not something to be feared. For it is only by passing through the veil separating this life from the next life that we will ever see God and truly know Him as He is; it is only through death that we can come to behold God face to face. So ultimately, death is something for which we hope, and we must hold fast to our hope now.

Note well that for the Christian, hope is not a fleeting feeling or a sentimental wishing that something will come true for us. For us, hope is a virtue; it’s an act of the will by which we desire to be with God and choose to have unlimited confidence in His grace that can make our union with Him possible – despite our sins. As St. Paul tells us today, “hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Hope does not disappoint. While we are *heart-broken* because Dad was such a *good* man and we so very naturally miss him, we are *hopeful* because God is *Goodness* itself! We hope now that, in God’s goodness, Dad is using those true blue eyes of his to behold God face to face.

Yes, we miss Dad. We miss his true blue eyes, his boyish charm, his corny sense of humor, the way he whistled and sang to us and gave us all crazy nicknames, and most especially we miss his tender affection. But let us hope ever so confidently in God’s goodness that we will see Dad again and together behold God Himself for all eternity.

Pop, may the choirs of angels welcome you and lead you to the bosom of Abraham; and where Lazarus is poor no longer, may you see God with those beautiful blue eyes of yours and find eternal rest.