

- This past Monday I had the sad duty of offering the funeral Mass for a friend from my college days who died last week from cancer. His name was Brad, and he was only 49.
- Ever since I met Brad all those many years ago, he was always the life of the party – a man, who at 6’5” and well over 300 lbs, had a body to go with that big personality of his.
- Sadly, Brad didn’t always live the best life, nor was he always a good man. He caused a lot of heartache for his family by some of the terrible choices he made in life. A few years ago he ended up destroying his family, alienating his wife and kids.
- Of course when his life blew up, whom did he call? And over a period of time I worked with Brad to get his act together. Brad ended up converting to Catholicism, and he became very involved in his new parish.
- Over the past few years, he worked hard to reconcile with his ex-wife and his children – which he eventually did, thanks be to God.
- But let’s be clear about something. Even when we want to convert, it’s not easy to let go of old attachments. Old habits die hard, especially the bad ones. And my friend Brad really struggle with his attachments to this world, even after his conversion to the Faith.
- He loved life: this life, to the detriment of his faith in the life to come.
- The moral choices that we make in life have the power to shape and form us. And as habits are created by the choices we make, it’s very difficult to be reformed.
- Our habitual sins keep us from desiring Heaven as we should, they blind us to the necessity of living life in such a way that prepares us for Heaven. Yet when we pursue holiness, we actually desire Heaven.
- When Brad got the news in July that he had terminal cancer with no hope of survival, he was absolutely dumbfounded, and for the past three months he fought as hard as he could to stave off death.
- Brad loved life, but I also think he had some amount of fear of facing God for his sins of the past.
- On my visits home I found myself in the terrible position of trying to be sympathetic to his feelings while also trying to get Brad to prepare spiritually for the inevitable.
- While, in a worldly sense, it’s tragic to die young, as Christians we know that death is actually something we should desire – something to be welcomed – for it’s only through death that we get to eternal life.
- As for Brad, it took until the very last day of his life for him to begin to desire death. In His infinite wisdom our Lord allowed Brad to suffer terribly – to suffer enough to make him weary of this life and look forward to the life to come.
- A few hours before he died, Brad received the Last Rites and the apostolic pardon from his pastor, and he died reconciled with his ex-wife, his children, and with God and His Church. Not so bad for a sinner of Brad’s caliber!
- While Brad most likely has some time to spend in Purgatory, I believe that man who, just a few short years ago was a very unlikely candidate for Heaven, received our Lord’s mercy and will enjoy eternal beatitude with our Lord.
- So how did a sinner like my friend hit the spiritual lottery? Did God just have pity on him out of a whim and suddenly move him to conversion? Was Brad just lucky to have found Catholicism and to have a priest handy when his time was up?

- Of course not! Lots of people were praying for Brad. I'm convinced that it was those prayers, combined with the terrible sufferings of his cancer, which eventually moved him to accept the divine mercy that God extends to each and every soul.
- Our prayers matter! They work! And through our prayers we help each other along the path to salvation. I saw this with my friend, Brad, just as I've seen it so many times with other souls.
- I also believe that in His wisdom and providence, God allowed Brad's cancer to give him an opportunity to make reparation for his life of sin so that his purgatory might be lessened.
- Today we honor the souls of all the deceased, praying especially for all those souls still languishing in Purgatory. This feast reminds us of our solemn duty to pray for the poor souls in Purgatory, just as the saints in Heaven pray for us.
- In fact, the Church grants priests the special privilege of offering 3 Masses on this day so that through the offering of these Masses souls might be released from Purgatory!
- Here at St. Ann's we have the beautiful custom in November of displaying the names of all the members of this parish who have died since our parish was founded as a reminder to pray from them.
- We also offer a Novena of Masses for all the deceased whom you list on your All Souls Offering envelope. And we provide a Book of the Dead as well where you can list the names of any other souls for whom you want prayers.
- These gestures, coupled with our earnest prayers and penances, bring great relief to the souls suffering in Purgatory, hastening their purification and readying them for Heaven!
- But just as we devote attention during this month to praying for the happy repose of the souls of the Church Suffering, we must also keep in mind our own death and what lies beyond it.
- Our Gospel makes it clear today that God wants us in Heaven, that it is His will that all of us be raised on the last day. But as we know, God never forces His will upon us...not even His burning desire to save us. We must choose it.
- We choose to be saved by our love for God and one another, by our obedience to His commandments, by our dutiful reception of the Sacraments, by our striving for virtue and shunning all sin, and by begging mercy for the times we fail.
- So let us earnestly pray today for all the poor souls in Purgatory, that they might be purified quickly and come to enjoy the eternal bliss of Heaven. Let us pray as well for the conversion of all sinners, that they, too, might come to know and love God.
- And let us turn our minds and hearts to the saints in Heaven too, asking them to assist us in living holy and virtuous lives here on earth so that we, too, might join them in praising God unceasingly in Heaven.