

Fr. Steven Baumbusch Funeral Homilies for his parents

FUNERAL HOMILY FOR MOM

I've been thinking a lot lately... about heroes. Last year, when Mom was going through the recovery from her open heart surgery and then the broken hip, my brother Jim and I were with her in the hospital. It hadn't been a very good day for her; she was hurting, she was tired, she was discouraged. As we were getting ready to leave for the night, Jim leaned in and kissed her and said, "You're my hero, Mom."

Jim got it right. There's no better way to describe Mom, her life and her death, than to call her a hero. Think about the qualities and effects of heroes. They're courageous, they endure, they sacrifice, they give of themselves, they remain faithful in the face of any trial, they lead, they inspire, they are ultimately victorious.

We know very well about Mom's courage in the face of trials and sufferings. Losing Diane to cancer, she and Dad had to confront the most devastating thing any parent can experience: burying their own child. Then Mom's own battle with cancer and the terrible effects of the treatment, on to her heart failure, bypass surgery, broken hip, rehabilitation, grueling therapy, and in the midst of all that, giving up her home of 40 years, her comfort zone, entering into a brand new situation and environment where she didn't know anyone, how things work, what she's supposed to do, how she should act.

Pretty scary stuff. It takes a hero's courage and endurance to go through it with a sense of calm and determination. Now, the typical thing you might be expecting to hear is something like: "...and she did all that without ever uttering even one word of complaint or discouragement."

Well... that wouldn't be absolutely true. Heroes are people like you and me, and there's no doubt that Mom had her bad days, times when she felt like it was enough already, too much in fact.

But the way I see it, those were the days that she showed herself to be even more heroic. Because heroism, like love, is not a feeling; it's a decision. Sometimes, Mom FELT lousy, she FELT discouraged, she FELT like giving up; but she DECIDED to carry on, she decided to keep on trusting, trusting in the love of her family and friends, trusting in the goodness and love of the Lord.

She decided to remain faithful, to keep believing in the things that had become the basis and foundation of her life's journey. Because it wasn't only in these last few years of struggle and hardship that Mom could claim the title of hero. Her whole life was one of giving of herself, showing love by word and example, trusting in and witnessing to God's love and presence. With all the human weaknesses that we all share, she provided a living testimony, a heroic testimony, to her faith in the goodness of the Lord.

That, too, is a lesson for us. Because the heroism that Mom was able to show at the end of her life is not something that just happens. It takes practice, and it becomes visible in countless little acts of kindness, of self-sacrifice, of giving, of compassion, of sharing, of believing, of inspiring.

That's how Mom lived, and this past week I saw just one more evidence of it in the words of one her fellow residents at Mayfair Village, who gave what I consider to be the greatest tribute to Mom's life-giving goodness and witness, when she said, "I wish I had known her sooner." What a great compliment! And those of us who HAVE "known her sooner," who have had the privilege of years and decades worth of her loving presence in our lives, will each of us in our own way recognize what a blessing, what a gift, what a hero she has been for us.

Heroes inspire. The best way that we can honor Mom is to follow her example of love, of faithfulness, of giving and self-sacrifice. Let her life be the inspiration for us to practice heroic virtues in simple and ordinary ways.

Heroes are ultimately victorious. Most heroic tales have a happy ending: the village is saved, the nation is born, the sacrifices of the hero have been meaningful and worthwhile. Our hero's tale is also one of victory, and in this case the victory comes from outside of herself. Mom's heroic life and death point to and remind us of the greatest hero, the One who offered His life for our salvation, the One whose death and Resurrection won the victory for her and for all of us, the One who gives to Mom and to all of us a share in that victory and new life in the Kingdom of God: our Savior, Jesus Christ.

And that's why, even in the midst of our pain over the loss of Mom, even as we deeply miss her light and presence in our lives, even as we FEEL sad and maybe even a little discouraged, we DECIDE to keep on believing... to keep on believing in the happiest of endings, which is not really an ending at all, but the beginning of new life. Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life calls us to have faith in Him and in the Father, who welcomes Mom into her new home, where she receives a hero's welcome, and her well deserved reward of rest and peace.

FUNERAL MASS FOR DAD

I've been thinking a lot lately about PRIDE...and JOY. I'm pretty sure that almost everyone here is familiar with that reference; in fact, I'm guessing that we've all heard Dad tell us about his pride and joy multiple times. Today, as we gather together in this Mass of Resurrection for Dad, in spite of the sadness and the pain of loss, I find myself filled with pride and joy about Dad's life among us. I'm proud of my Dad. I'm proud of the joy that he has brought to so many people through the years with his jokes, his positive attitude, his light-hearted, whimsical way of looking at the world.

We all know another of Dad's favorites. When asked, "How are you?" The response is ALWAYS... "Wonderful, but I'm getting better." But I remember way back when Dad first started saying that. Now it's something that we take for granted as his normal response, but in the beginning, people would be a little startled, or taken aback. But he had an explanation. He said, "Well, you know so many times when you ask people how they're doing, they start right away to tell you all their troubles. 'Oh, this is going wrong, and this is hurting and life is tough.' Well, that's not the way I want to look at things. I've been blessed and happy and I expect more blessings to come." That's why, after some time, he began adding, "I can't wait for tomorrow, because I keep getting better every day."

I'm proud of the gratitude and the faith that's contained in that sentiment...Dad's thankfulness for all the blessings he's received from God, and his faith in God's continued goodness, a faith that EXPECTS God to continue to bless him, not because of anything special he has done to deserve it, but simply because God is so good.

Later, as his health deteriorated, his gratitude and faith carried on. Just recently, he told us in the family: "Look, I don't want anybody feeling sorry for me, or thinking 'Oh, poor Bill,' or getting sad about me. I've had a great life. I haven't been perfect by any means; I've made a lot of mistakes, but pretty much I've lived my life the way I wanted to and I'm happy with it."

I'm proud of my Dad and the effect that his joy has had on so many other people. I can't tell you how many times it's happened to me that someone I just met will tell me: "Hey, I know your father. He came up to me at a garage sale and started telling me jokes. It really picked up my day." That's what we'll continue to remember and cherish. A while back, in an email message, my cousin Kevin said about Dad: "Every laugh, every play-on-words, every joke I tell, every smile I have, he's there with me!" You said it for all of us, Kevin.

Pride and joy. In many ways, we could say that Dad's life was one of good news. And of course, we Christians have another name for 'good news': it's called GOSPEL. Living a Gospel life means to be filled with the good news of God's love and constant presence. Living a Gospel life means to know the joy of Christ's victory over sin and death.

All of us baptized into Christ Jesus are called to that Gospel life, to that life of good news. We're called to that same gratitude and faith that praises God for his goodness and expects blessings from our loving Father. We're called to that deep, inner joy: a joy that can't be defeated by hardship and struggles, a joy that can't be defeated by our own failings and sinfulness, a joy that can't be defeated by suffering and death. Nothing can touch the joy in our hearts that comes from our communion with Jesus Christ and the share that he gives us in the triumph of his Resurrection. And that's why today, even in our sorrow and loss, we can celebrate with joy the new life that Dad has entered into as he receives his own share in that Resurrection.

I remember one time talking to Dad about the afterlife, about Heaven. He said, "Well, the way I figure it is once you're in Heaven, and you see God face to face and you feel his love directly, you're not gonna want anything else. That's about the best there is." That's what we celebrate today. Now, Dad's joy is complete. Now, his joy is everlasting. And now if we were to ask him, "How you doing, Dad?" I know what his answer would be: "I'm wonderful. Full of wonder in God's presence. And it doesn't get any better than this."

Steve