

My first experience of death was my grandfather. He was almost 80 years old. He smelled like Parliament cigarettes, watched (or listened) the Detroit Tigers ... loudly ... would play Euchre as if it were life and death ... and he died in 1974.

I have his Rosary and prayer book from World War I; and I brought it with me into Boot Camp twenty years later.

I have my grandmother's hand Missal from 1962, and a dried flower from her funeral.

I sang at their funerals. It took me a while to be able to handle singing "I Am the Bread of Life" after that.

I wear my Great Uncle Joe's watch. And I have a ceramic blue dog ... or cat ... well ... some sort of abstract animal-looking thing-y ... from my Great Aunt Helen.

I presided at their burials in a family plot down in Detroit, and offered private Masses with family members for them.

When my Godfather Leonard died, I presided at his wake service, and concelebrated at his funeral.

These are the things I will remember. And the things that I have kept that help me to remember.

I haven't counted the number of funerals I've presided at ... but I do remember that the youngest was 5 years old. And I remember how I felt when I've presided at a funeral for someone who was almost exactly my own age.

Isn't funny the things we remember?

And here we are tonight to remember our loved ones who have died ... who affected our lives. Parents, spouses, relatives, children. And especially our loved ones who have died in the last 12 months ... for our annual Holy Family Parish Memorial Mass.

Death is never easy, but it most certainly is final.

In the First Reading from Wisdom, we hear:

The souls of the just are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch them.

I sat with my grandparents in the hospital. I anointed my great aunt and my great uncle in the hospital. My godfather died from pancreatic cancer. In all of these cases, and anytime when there is a period of illness or suffering ... there was a comfort in these words from Wisdom.

St. Paul tells us that:

*we who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death ...
so that ...
we too might live in newness of life.*

And while we may not have certainty as to just 'what' that "*newness of life*" looks like, the Gospel reading from St. Matthew ... the Beatitudes ... tells us that we will be "*blessed*" and will receive "*comfort*" and "*mercy*" ... "*satisfaction*" and "*peace*" ... we will "*inherit*" ... "*the Kingdom of heaven*" ... we will be called "*children of God*" ... and we "*will see God*".

So we who remain ... abide in Faith, Hope, and Love ... "*in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, they will rise with him on the last day*" ... and here, tonight, we "*comfort one another with assurances of faith, until we all meet in Christ and are with our*" loved ones ... in eternity.

Eternal rest ...