

How God Works

A Collection of Instances

Revealing the Lord's Providential Hand

(including

“O Daddy! My Daddy!”)

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1

I bought a computer. It gave me nothing but headaches for a couple of months: it didn't connect with the Internet; it blew out when I connected a scanner; I got a new motherboard, but it still wouldn't connect properly with the scanner and was doing strange things (like highlighting and opening all the items on the desktop at once).

The Blessed Mother had let me know I would have problems if I chose the company I did, but also said they would be eliminated. They seemed only to get worse, and the worst part was I couldn't get service on the phone. (I'd bought it from a company without a retail outlet.) Repeatedly and eternally I would be put on hold, switched to another person, and put on hold again. It was my first real dealing with a worldly enterprise and I couldn't believe the treatment. And I didn't accept my cross patiently.

This was the key. I became quickly angry at all the difficulties and the apparent incompetence of those with whom I spoke. This is what the Lord and His Blessed Mother wanted for me to overcome. I had not been the most patient person before, and now it was showing.

Finally, I resolved not to get angry. Seeking resolution to an additional problem (not having on the machine what I'd ordered), I accepted without judgment, quietly, the lack of response, the holding on line, the referrals... and in the end found a saleswoman who provided a free, significant upgrade on the return of my model. And it works fine.

2

I spent the weekend in Florida for my parents' fiftieth anniversary. I was to return to New Jersey Monday afternoon. That morning there was a terrible accident with a plane just leaving a New York airport – more than 250 people were killed when the plane crashed in a residential area near the airport.

Coming so soon after a monumental terrorist attack in a place (same city) so close to that destruction, it was suspected that terrorists had again struck, and all area airports were closed, including the one I was to fly into. The crash was eventually ruled an accident, though a horrible one, and the airports were later opened. But not before my initial flight was canceled.

My reservation was switched to a later (evening) flight from the same airport, but I had the idea to find a place on a plane from the airport closer to my parents' house. I was told there were many seats open on this more local and earlier plane, and decided to go standby.

I waited with my parents at the airport for the New York airports to reopen and allow my flight to depart, suffering a good measure of confusion and distraction (with some misinformation) as I tried to maintain my other reservation while waiting for this plane to depart. As my parents left the airport, they inquired of the airline and were told the plane would depart in a half-hour – this though they had a short time before told me it would be at least two hours. My father fished me out of

the restaurant wherein I was watching the news – a place announcements are not broadcast (?) – and I rushed to the counter. In about an hour, after some more confusion, I was on board the plane with the other passengers. (The airline was trying to find the others whom it had told it would definitely not be leaving for another two hours or so, and had apparently succeeded.)

We sat on the plane an hour and a half. There was a mechanical problem – a small hole in the engine. After the hour and a half had elapsed, everyone was deplaned, and I found myself back at the counter at the time previously proposed for potential departure. Now we would be bused to another airport an hour and a half away to catch a flight on a plane that was just then leaving the New York area.

The bus ride went smoothly, and at the airport the plane landed on time. There was a quick turnaround, and we were taking off at 7:45 p.m. – the exact time of my replacement flight from the original airport.

(All is in God's hands. Though we run about in anxious anticipation... all is in His will. How we struggle to accept this.)

I arrived home quickly and safely, and can only pray for the souls of those who lost their lives, and for their families.

3

All was going quite well. The Lord's peace was with me and I felt myself renewed in His presence, fresh and patient and holy. Then after morning Mass, I feared I might be a little late for class, so I began to rush, knowing especially I needed to make copies for the lesson.

I made it to class on time, and actually had to wait for several students to arrive before I could begin. (It's a small class.) In my haste I had already begun to lose the possession of my soul the Lord had graced me with, and by the end of class, nearly three hours later, and on my way home... I was well unsettled in spirit. And I didn't even use the copies I'd made as part of my lesson.

Patience must be found. Time must be taken to remain in the Lord's presence. Nothing should distract us from this our primary focus.

4

Playing football on Thanksgiving Day with cousins and cousins' children, the NAME of God (YHWH) on the scapular I had made separated from its chain and the rings which held the two together were lost.

But returning home that evening I found doubled rings on an old rosary and utilized them to reattach the nameplate of the Lord to the chain, thus making the connection twice as strong.

Such is the Lord's redemption. Such is His reparation of our souls and His reuniting us with the Father by the grace of His flesh and blood. Upon our salvation, we are twice as strong as once we were; and so St. John can sing, "O happy fault!"

5

“The LORD is what He will be, and you must stand by Him,” I hear. Perhaps it is a lesson I shall learn from the sickness that is upon me.

This illness has attacked particularly my throat and left me virtually without voice. Will I learn now not to speak foolishly? Will I remember thus the silent NAME whose symbol (YHWH) I wear around my neck? Will I indeed come more so into His presence? Will my sickness therefore be fruitful?

It seems this is the call I might find. It seems this is a lesson well worth learning. In His sight may I stand.

“May the spoken words of my mouth,
the thoughts of my heart,
win favor in your sight, O Lord,
my rescuer, my rock!”

6

I lie prostrate, face down on the floor, in the temple of the Lord, before His holy altar... in the presence of His exposed Blessed Sacrament.

And the silence, which had escaped me of late, begins to overtake me, like light falling upon me.

And having just come from Confession, I sense the grace pouring upon me every moment I stay here beyond the hour allotted.

And I am floating, growing in His presence... As a baby expresses himself in sounds without words, I speak in tongues to the Lord and express my love.

And I am finding healing, in the silence of His presence, in His encompassing light.

I love you, O Lord. Keep me close.

(I am bleeding now, before the picture of His Sacred Heart... His love only grows.)

- And all this as drilling goes on outside these walls and men in heavy boots step within inches of my head.

... and now I cannot leave.

His healing light is penetrating my mind, penetrating my body, my heart and my soul.

7

I am still here. When one comes to know He is present, how can one leave? Where can one go?

I feel Him working upon me, and I cannot tear myself away. I want only to embrace the Sacrament.

God is there! What could be more mystical, what could be more marvelous? He is here with us. One can say He is everywhere and in us all, and how true... but so real He is upon this altar, so ready to contemplate.

No greater work is there than this!

I cannot leave.

(A brother has come. Now, after so long, I may go.

But I shall never leave Him.)

8

There is a healing. There is a healing in turning away from sin.
There is a healing in coming into His presence.

For so long, it seems, I did not pray. It seems so long since I have been conscious of Him in my prayer time. The end of the time has more often been my desire than the sitting with Him in peace.

Last night, again, I breathed the Sorrowful Mysteries. Last night (since when?) I took the time to commune in thought and word – and with soul, and heart, and mind, and body... *prayed*.

And the hour was full, for the first time in a long time. It ended at the moment designated, as I knew it would, as it always does when I give Him this time and set my heart on coming into His presence.

Upon finishing breathing out the Mysteries – in silence, my heart reaching up to Him, my mind picturing His suffering, my lips speaking the prayers... I looked at the clock: “9:00”. And time for sleep.

9

This Advent season I wait for the Lord's light to come upon my heart, to heal it, to purify it. To thoroughly cleanse me from my sin and wash me of my guilt, this is my prayer.

I have hope that He will come and fulfill His Word to me, to make me His own. I must believe that His way will be made clear before me, that I will stand with Him.

Hope is what this season holds; each year, however many years we live – hope is there. Do we cherish it well? Do we call upon its favor? Do we seek its light?

The Lord will come. He will come again and make all things new. He did this once, He will do this finally, and He does this each day – but particularly in this Advent season. The renewal wrought upon the face of the earth for the Church militant is saliently known in this blessed time. Again, do we feel it to our bones?

Hope is always needed. In our hearts let us seek it. Let the Lord work in your life.

10

On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe I was unsure whether to maintain my fast (bread and water on Wednesdays and Fridays) or forego it for the sake of the day.

The day is only a memorial in general, but for the Americas (of which she is the patroness) I was told it is celebrated as a feast – a feast would preclude a fast, but not a memorial.

In the morning I ate bread as on any Wednesday and heard the Blessed Mother answer (upon my asking what was best to do) that if food should come my way during the day I should accept it, which I took as a good resolution.

I could only think how rare it is that I come across food offered to me during a day of teaching, but when I came into an office to tutor a student, a supervisor said, “I don’t know if this is one of your fast days, but the campus party for staff and faculty is today and you’re welcome to go over and get some food.”

How clearly sometimes the Lord speaks.

11

As I drink in the Holy Scripture for this Christmas Day, a silence suddenly falls upon me, a quiet to my ears speaking love to my heart: a peace. A light rises outside my window, filling the land.

But how can this be? It is yet nearly three hours before dawn. From where does this light come? And what of this peace settling into my heart?

A gift. A gift for Christmas, that which I desired most, that which I have come to discern is the only one with meaning, the only one appropriate for this Day – the peace of Christ, the presence of Jesus within me.

May that which has come to me, remain with me; and may the peace of His presence permeate the land. To the ends of the earth let His silence be heard; let all hearts be touched by His love.

Thank you, Lord, for your gift, for your presence among us.

12

The path to the Mass at Dawn this Christmas morning was remarkably clear and straight.

Having passed a lengthy traffic light outside the complex in which my parents live, I did not hit a single light, did not have to stop once all the way to the church parking lot several miles away.

It is a trip that usually takes more than twice as long, but the lack of cars, the more direct route, and the blessing of missing all stop lights gets me to the church in the downtown area of the city in which my parents dwell in ten minutes.

“That’s a miracle in itself,” my father says when I return home.

“O Daddy! My Daddy!”

My father died. Three words I thought somehow I would never have to say. Three words these two and a half weeks after the day with which I find it still difficult to come to terms.

He was seventy-four years old, yes. He suffered various ailments – his heart, his blood sugar, his eyes, his foot, his knee, his hand, his back... all seemed to be giving out, but even the day before it happened, I realized that I never looked upon his aging. He and my mother had difficulty hearing me speak, but I did not allow them this frailty. Always they were my mother and father, and so not like others. My heart was not set upon their aging or dying; to me they lived forever.

It was sudden, yes, very sudden. And though I seemed to discern signs of its coming, it arrived completely unexpected. He himself seemed to have a sense of its imminent arrival, yet we never know...

He let me drive his car for the first time in my life, and I am forty-one years old. Whenever I'd visit my parents in Florida, usually at Christmastime, he would drive me to daily Mass, the principal place I needed to go. He'd come in and sit with me or sometimes stay in the car and read, and then drive us home when Mass was over. He couldn't receive because he was not Catholic, but he always remained attentive to the priest. (He would often question how people could come in late, sometimes very late, for the Mass.)

I must confess I often prayed for his conversion – asking him once or twice on our ride home if he didn't want to receive Holy Communion, and taking encouragement one Easter while visiting my parents upon seeing several elderly folks readying to receive the sacraments for the first time. I suppose he would have if he'd seen it as necessary, or perhaps if I could have better conveyed my love for Jesus.

He would watch various specials on cable TV having to do with the Bible or the life of the Lord, and we would sometimes discuss them. I was often impatient at the lack of substantiation for the ideas presented, particularly in light of the gospels, and he was always questioning. (Our final interchange on such matters I recall preaching the failure of many experts to understand the nature of prophecy.) But he was certainly a believer in God, and in His Son.

And he was always my Daddy and I was always his son. Through the many years – my parents had in fact celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary less than two months before his death – he was always close to my heart. When I was a boy he would often walk with me and play with me, seeming always to be around to love me. One of my earliest and fondest memories is of his making a little boat out of bark, a twig, and a leaf for a sail, and setting it on the pond as we watched it move with the wind...

I remember so much about him as I think of the house in which I grew up and spent the better part of the first thirty years of my life – until my parents retired to Florida. There were the plastic golf balls he'd hit against the back of the house, his painting in the cellar, our watching TV together and playing games... as well as the small dog he'd brought home one day in a box. (My father would always be her favorite.) When

he'd come home from work, always smiling, he'd lift up my brother and sister and I to his face and rub his bristly late-day beard against our soft skin. I particularly recall my sister and he laughing greatly at this.

My little sister died when she was only fifteen, and my father never really got over or understood it. Despite the fact that she had appeared to him the night she died to assure him she was all right, yet did he wonder and cry. I would find him sometimes, years later, sitting on the couch in the middle of the night, before going out to work at three or four, weeping. I tried to remind him of her place in heaven, but he just missed her too much to accept things. But he was never bitter. For everyone he had a smile, just like the daughter he'd lost.

I could go on with a flood of memories that pour upon me – our racing together up the street, the soap box car he made for me, his whistling us boys home from the park at dinner time, or, later, the wisdom of his words which finally began to penetrate my stubborn skull... but perhaps I should return to the time of his dying.

As I've stated, there seemed to have been signs that he may have sensed his death coming. Why was he handing the responsibility of driving his car to me so suddenly and so without hesitation, something that was never even whispered of in the past for me or my brother? Was he in some way handing me the reins? And there was more than one curious occurrence I discovered following his death, centered principally around the game of golf he loved and died while playing.

First, when I received his personal effects back from the hospital to which he had been taken, I found two golf balls among the items. Each was marked with the drawing of a face, smiling and looking over the edge of a wall. I had never seen such a mark on his golf balls before. He

did mark his balls – usually with a black dot or an “x” or his initials – but this mark was unknown to me, despite the fact he had given me dozens of his used golf balls when I took up the game a few years before. My brother didn’t think it quite as unusual, but I couldn’t help but wonder if he hadn’t left one for each of us.

Second, I had been, both the day of his death and following, most upset at myself for not being as obedient a son to him as I could and should have been. Once in this latest visit he had tried to give me one of his white jackets to wear instead of the black one I had recently bought and was wearing every day, thinking especially that it was more appropriate for Mass at Christmastime. But I turned the jacket down. Also, he had tried to give me a pair of old golf shoes to wear the first time I went out to play with my brother – his knee was ailing too much for him to go – but I thought them too old-fashioned (they had this flap covering the laces) and expressed my desire to wear the shoes I’d worn on my last visit. These shoes I could not locate, though, nor could he – and so I used another pair.

The night before we were to go out golfing (and when he would die), I spied the shoes in the garage. But the next day when we were to leave, again they were not around, and my father seemed not aware of their presence anywhere. As I’ve said, after his death I greatly regretted rebuffing his proposals – he was a little hurt by each rejection – and the day following his death I was exposing this sense of guilt to my mother. As I said, in earnest, “Why couldn’t I have been more obedient?” while reaching into the back seat to retrieve something for my mom, at that same moment I noticed the shoes I had wanted to wear but couldn’t find on the floor of the back seat of the car.

How had they gotten there? Why were they there? It seemed to me an answer to my prayer for forgiveness, as if my father were saying, "Here are the shoes you wanted. Do not worry about having disobeyed. I forgive you." My mother told me that he had been wearing these shoes, actually more like sneakers, recently because all others hurt his foot. I had in fact noticed that he had cut the front off one other sneaker so it would fit his diabetes-stricken foot comfortably, but never really paid attention to what he wore. But why were the shoes in the back seat? He never changed shoes at the course, especially a short course like the one I always went to. Was he just forgetful, or did he place them there for a reason? I have them in my possession now.

Finally, a most wonderful sign. I had bought my father a Bible a couple of years ago when he had taken me to a religious bookstore, and he had always left it in the car. It had of late taken up residence in the trunk. It was always closed. I had borrowed it a few days before and returned it to its place, closed. After my father's attack I went to the hospital in the ambulance, my brother went home to find his wife, and my father's car was left at the course. The next day I picked it up. Later on that day I had occasion to open the trunk (to store groceries or something).

Now my father had always seemed a wise man to me, simple but very wise. We were very opposite in this respect. My mouth ran on about whatever was on my mind; he was often silent about things he knew – not speaking of them until and unless necessary. It would often exasperate me, actually, when he would answer to my confusion about a subject: "Do I have to *tell* you?" I would say, "Yes! Just *tell* me." But he would just walk away, sometimes in disgust at my ignorance. I recall

once quoting to him Jesus' words that we must be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," and he responded: "Well, you have the 'harmless as doves' part." Finding the wisdom I so lack has been a particular preoccupation of mine over the past several years.

When I opened the trunk of the car, the Bible I had given my father was wide open and lying flat on its covers. It was open to the Book of Wisdom. There staring me in the face in large letters was the word "WISDOM". There is little natural explanation of how the Bible came to be open . It could not have occurred with simple jostling, say when the golf clubs were drawn out. It would have taken much more to get the book, a soft cover edition, flat open to its center. Did my father intentionally open it to this page? How much did God's hand lead him? It could only have been accomplished somewhere between him and the Lord. It is an unmistakable sign. (Note: as I shall recount later, the day following my father's death was Epiphany – the feast celebrating the wise men following the star hailing Jesus' birth.)

My Christmas stay at my parents' house had begun two and a half weeks before my father's death, and was to have ended two days after. It had been extended to twice its normal length mainly to find a less expensive airline ticket, and was made possible by the death of my cat (whom now I needed not to rush home to) during an Easter stay at my parents' house (and a vocation journey) earlier the same year, as well as my being able to leave my car in my landlord's driveway back home. Curiously enough, the days of my arrival and departure were given my father as the possible ones for a cataract surgery the doctor had said he needed. He chose the day I arrived, and so I took the bus from the

airport, since he couldn't pick me up. (It is less than a half hour drive by car, maybe an hour by bus – but very convenient, for the bus left me off right in front of the complex in which my parents live.)

I arrived at the house in the early afternoon on the nineteenth of December, carrying my duffel bag of clothes and a backpack of books. When I came in, my mother said there was good and bad news: my father's laser eye surgery had gone well that morning, but the doctor had given him an EKG afterward and found something wrong with his heart. My father had had a quintuple bypass some twelve years before, as well as other operations to improve the circulation especially in his right leg, and so was prone to problems in this area – and I'm sure the tension of being at the doctor's office all morning didn't help his condition. My father didn't care for doctors much; in fact, he had thrown away all his heart medicine not long after his bypass operation, disliking what it was doing to him. He had hardly been to a doctor since. It probably added to his tension that my mother wasn't there with him – she was waiting for me to arrive – to help him with the myriad of paperwork she ordinarily took care of. And they say the cataract surgery itself can put pressure on the heart.

Whatever the cause, the doctor wanted him to see a cardiologist immediately. Somehow, instead he was taken by van to his general doctor, whom, as I've mentioned, he had not been seeing very long. After taking another EKG, this doctor concluded there was no major problem, gave my father some medicine, and told him to come back for a stress test – which would end up being scheduled for the day I was to leave (better than two and a half weeks hence).

Later that afternoon my father finally called the house. (We had tried earlier to get information on what had happened to him, but the office worker my mother spoke to at the eye doctor's office had no idea where my father might have been taken.) He needed to be picked up from the hospital, where he had been waiting an hour or more for a promised van which never came.

This would be the first time I had ever driven any of my father's cars (at least since I was eighteen and he was teaching me how to drive), and though it seemed necessary at this point, I was still surprised at his readiness to allow me to drive. (Any other time he would probably have called a cab or even walked – the hospital was only across the highway, maybe a quarter of a mile from my parents' house.)

He was sitting outside talking to someone - as usually he was – when my mother and I arrived. When he saw the car, parked a slight distance away, he got up quickly and walked over to it – he wouldn't have wanted to have us wait. He got into the back seat and told us of the travails of the day, though with patience and a measure of peace (perhaps "acceptance" is a better word). I told him the car seemed difficult to drive, and he noticed the emergency brake was still on. (I would have a little difficulty at first remembering to take this brake off, and so he would leave it off after he had used the car – I suppose now there's less wonder at why he never let me drive.)

He guided me off the hospital grounds and across the highway, and we stopped at the supermarket for my mom to pick up the medicine he needed, and eye drops. My father and I waited in the car a considerable time, and he described to me the laser eye surgery he had undergone. He'd spent most of the morning at the office for a procedure

that lasted but a few minutes, being moved from one room to another with groups of others, until finally his time came. Several times in the coming days he would remark how the laser had so cleared his eye, and the light was so bright, that it seemed as if he could see through walls.

(Note: while writing the previous paragraph in a Laundromat, now in the season of Lent, a young girl was struggling to unravel the cord of a laundry bag which had gotten caught up in the wheel of a cart. She and her family had been waiting with a number of bags for a taxi to take them home. The scene reminded me of a time our family dog – who could no longer walk – had gotten her paw somehow twisted into the wrought-iron circular design of a foot of one of the kitchen chairs. I was alone in the house, and though I tried several times, I could not figure how to release her paw. A good ten minutes passed. Then my father returned from work and I anxiously pointed out to him the problem. (I was in my twenties at the time.) He bent down, and in a second – no more – he had her paw freed.

I looked at the girl and the wheel a moment, believing the cord seemed hopelessly entangled. But thinking of my father I silently bent over and, with a few moves of the cord, had in seconds untangled the entire mess – just as the mother came back from the car to pick up this the final bag. Perhaps I do have hope of wisdom.)

Upon our return home another serious matter arose. My father had been picked up first thing in the morning to be taken to the eye surgeon. It was now three o'clock. He was not to have breakfast before his operation, and he had nothing to eat all day. He was diabetic and someone should have been aware of the stress this put on his condition. He had felt weak but did not say anything, as was his way (and about

which I later chastised him). He tested his blood sugar almost immediately upon his return to the house and found his level to be 57! I feared greatly for his health but remained calm and, of course, both my mother and I insisted he eat quickly. He took a piece of candy, and later some bread, and seemed to be better. But the nearness of death I had sensed twice this day.

Generally his sugar level had been on the low side since he had started taking medicine for the first time a few months before. Prior to this it had ranged high for quite some time, and the fact that the medicine held down the level seemed a good thing – perhaps there was some “good” medicine after all, was my thought, for I shared (and share) my father’s inclination to avoid drugs. But, mostly in retrospect, that the medicine now made him range low probably was not the best thing; it probably tended to go against his grain, and so I am left again to wonder about the efficacy of this as well as all medicine.

And now he would start to take heart medicine for the first time since he threw it all away some twelve years before. I considered questioning him on the benefits or dangers of such practice – and we did speak of it in passing – but concluded generally that perhaps there comes a time when such medicine is necessary, and I couldn’t really intimate not taking anything because of his condition.

However, a couple of weeks later, a few days before his death, my father noticed that he felt strange, not right. Again we only considered in passing that it might be the medicine, and I said he had to know his own body and what to do... (I did get the sense he seriously thought of discontinuing taking the medicine.)

My father also had to take eye drops at this time. He had begun several days before his operation in preparation, and now was to continue afterward for a few weeks more. Not only that, he had at this time only had one eye cleared – the other was to be done the day I was to leave. So he would have to continue this process (on both eyes) through another few weeks beyond that operation.

My mother had accepted the job of applying the drops into his eyes because he couldn't see well enough to do it himself. Though he would get aggravated when my mother would, with some frequency, miss her mark, for me this sight was quite cute for a couple who had but the month before celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary. I must admit I found it amusing. (I might have helped out myself but I have a rather strong sensitivity toward anything touching the eyes.) My mother's aim improved as the time went along, but there was still the occasional misfire to get my father's ire up.

As if my father's problems with his heart and sugar and eyes and foot and hand (which he had to tape up to play golf) weren't enough, the day after I arrived my mother and I walked into the house upon our return from the mall and found him seated on the couch with a heating/massaging pad wrapped around his leg. He had somehow twisted or sprained his knee just going to the mailbox, and now could barely walk. He had always said, though never with anger or any real despair, that everyone had problems as they got older, but why did he have to have *everything*. It certainly seemed true enough at this time.

Even though he struggled in pain to get around, my father insisted on taking my mother to the stores. (In his last ten years, after his retirement to Florida, my father had taken on the role of chauffeur for my

mother and my aunt – who lived in their complex – and anyone who happened to be visiting.) I don't know how he did it, but he made it to K-Mart, the principal place he enjoyed wandering around, and where he'd bought maybe a hundred sale shirts over the years, managing, my mother said, by using a shopping cart as a walker. My mother also said that as he was attempting to get back into his car, someone came over and asked if he needed any help. I don't think he took it.

Maybe part of the reason I didn't really notice the years taking their toll on my father was because, like so many of the men in my family, he never really would let his problems show. I don't know if it's the best philosophy, but the general idea is that men do not complain. Unfortunately, they also do not take care of themselves as they should either. I recall in this last trip berating my father some for the food he was or was not eating, saying, "What is wrong with showing a little wisdom?" I suppose my generation lacks the same toughness, but also the same stubbornness.

My father was too incapacitated to play golf – my brother and I went out once or twice before going with him on the fateful day. And he was not really well enough to visit a nearby town as we had planned to do the Saturday after Christmas. A religious sister from my parish in New Jersey was visiting the town for a baptism celebration, and I had thought to meet her at the flea market which is a main attraction of the town. But she didn't call until New Year's Eve (the day before she was to leave) and even though we might still have gone to find a motel for my parents to stay in the night before their plane flight from the same town to San Francisco – and then a cruise they were to go on in a few weeks to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary with an aunt and uncle of mine who

were likewise celebrating fifty years together – there didn't seem much point to going if we couldn't walk around the flea market while down there. (The town is about an hour and a half away, and the reason my parents thought to stay overnight at a motel there was the earliness of their flight and my father's concern about early morning fog that had become rather frequent of late.)

Of course, they would never visit the town or make the motel reservations, for the trip had to be canceled upon my father's death... It's funny how some things don't come to be. I had prayed some ten years ago that my father would live these ten years at least, and he did. But my prayer for him to live till eighty (he was seventy-four) was not to be answered. Why? Surely there are many reasons, but in the end we must put all in the hands of God.

I am now in Florida again, better than two months after my father's death. My aunts had been staying in the house with my mother even until my arrival. These three sisters are now in the same state (my father was the last of the men alive on my mother's side) and share well their plight. My mother seems strong, but she will not really be alone in the house until after I leave in a week. But her sisters will always be near, my brother is in the same town, and she will visit me in New Jersey soon.

One senses the loss more palpably in the house the deceased most recently lived, for his presence remains there to some degree – at least we are reminded more easily. My sister's death did not really hit me hard until after I returned to my parents' house after college, and it sparked a deep conversion. Now what shall the death of my father bring to all our lives?

My Christmas stay seemed to be going all right despite my father's struggles with infirmities, but I felt a little distanced from him this time as I sought to maintain a semblance of the prayer schedule I had adopted, and so spent fewer hours in the night with him by the TV. And he, too, seemed to be struggling with difficulties more than just his physical pain; though he ever encouraged me at least in subtle words and gestures to stay longer with him, I sensed, particularly in the middle of the night when I would wake for prayer and reading and writing and would hear him in the kitchen taking a pill, that somehow the devil was testing him as he had not even through his years of hard labor and diminishing physical strength.

Did I imagine such dark testing on my father's soul, or was the evil one indeed near to tempt him? I will pronounce a possible cause for such subjection to the pangs of Satan in the proposition that my dad had, more so even than he did with his years of labor before, now undertaken to lay down his life for my sake. Have I cause to make such a proposition? I will try to explain.

Especially in the last couple of months, though really for a good year or two, I had found my own strength diminishing (though I am only forty-one) in repeated and seemingly growing weaknesses of body and mind. Since Thanksgiving and a football game with a cousin's children, wherein I lost my breath running up and down the street just once or twice and simply could not regain it for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes, I had not been well. Still I struggled with shortness of breath, perhaps compounded by teaching a few hours at a time at the college, most of the time of which I spend talking, not to mention the time I spend singing and praying aloud. I had hoped my extended visit to Florida would help me to fully recover.

But I could tell from our weekly phone conversations that my father was concerned, despite my assurance that I would be fine. I was foolish to keep mentioning the problems I was having, but I hadn't realized he would take them to heart. But then again my father took everything to heart. He always listened to what I said and responded, though not always in words, in a most understanding manner. He always seemed to know what I was saying, even when I did not express it well, and his answer always seemed to simply mine the heart of the question at hand. He rarely gave direct advice, sometimes, as I have mentioned, to my frustration, but he always gave an honest response that showed he knew what I said and he cared. He always listened.

Perhaps it was just my own arbitrary thought, after the death of my sister, that I would somehow be the next to go, but I did get the distinct impression that my father suspected that this indeed might be so, and that he would not allow it to happen. Having lost one child already, the thought of losing another would have been just too much for a man who treasured family and children above all else, and somehow I think this consideration played into his dying perhaps earlier than he might have.

As if to emphasize the forgetfulness I have been experiencing, I left the book in which I am writing this work at the mechanic's shop after finishing the previous page. (In fact, I had spoken with the owner of the shop about his relatively young wife's problems with M. S.) And in the days before my father's death I recall having several conversations with him and also my brother about my lack of physical strength. The discussions centered around golf and my assertion that I could not play longer/full courses because of my inability to drive the ball very far. They did their best to encourage me – my father citing examples of golfers

who are either thin or short but still hit the ball a long distance – but I felt the truth had to be faced: a man without muscle, lacking physical exercise, simply has little strength. I was not ashamed of being rather thin and weak, although I suppose they who (my father historically and my brother presently) were neither of these were attempting to guard me from this sense. To me a fact is a fact. (And, of course, spiritual strength is my preoccupation.)

It's funny. In the week before my father's death I had begun running on the treadmill, a few minutes the first day and then gradually a little more, and I did feel myself gaining strength. And I cannot forget my father's warm smile as I walked past the living room where he sat watching TV as I made my way from my short workout to the shower in a relative sweat and feeling healthy.

I had hoped that and encouraged my father to get some exercise on the treadmill before his upcoming stress test, and couldn't really understand why he wasn't trying to do so. (It was not until we were in the car on the way to the golf course the day of his death, upon asking why he didn't use the stationary bike he had put together if his foot hurt him too much to walk or jog, and he said he didn't want to push it, that I got a sense of how bad he was feeling.)

Once he did try the treadmill, and again I wasn't very sensitive to his plight. As he went into the garage he told me to be near the phone in case someone called. (My mother was at their complex' clubhouse.) I asked him if he was expecting a call, and when he said "no" I sort of brushed off the importance of worrying about it. I went to my room to read or pray before he'd returned from the garage, and when he came in the house he was upset at my having neglected the task he had set for

me. (I had the door to my room ajar and could easily hear the phone ring, but he didn't seem in a state of mind to understand that, so I let the situation go without explanation.)

The day before he died, when I returned from typing up some writings at my alma mater's computer lab, I noticed that my bathroom had been cleaned. Almost by way of excuse – I suppose he thought I might be upset – he admitted cleaning up there. I had planned to do it the next day along with other Saturday cleaning, but it was OK if he wanted to go ahead. He had also mopped the floors; a bucket of dirty water still lay on the floor outside the kitchen. I went to toss it out but he insisted on keeping it to clean his clubs, though he almost gave in when I noted how dirty the water was. (It was still in the garage a couple of days after his death.) What I didn't find out until the next morning was that he had also vacuumed all the carpets! I could not believe it. The vacuum is heavy and so takes some labor – this had become my regular job whenever I visited – and was much more than could have been expected of him. But he said, and told my mother, too, that he felt good that day.

(As I write this I sit in the clubhouse of the course on which my father died, waiting as we did that day for my brother to arrive so we can begin a round at the afternoon hour when the rate is much less. As on that day, I have arrived early and am first in line for the cheaper tee time – 3:00. I imagine as on that day there will be a large crowd behind us as we tee off, though I hear now that under new ownership they are allowing us expectants to get an electric cart prepared. The lack of this preparation created a real problem the last time. My father certainly needed a cart, and I stood at the tee a good five or ten minutes waiting for my brother and him to retrieve the cart and their clubs...)

(Now I find myself 30,000 feet in the air. For the first time in many years I have a window seat. When I began flying more than twenty years ago, I always would ask for a window seat to marvel at the view; but as I have grown older and more practical, I ask for an aisle seat so there is more legroom, and the rest room is more accessible.

But now again today I find myself marveling at the green of the gulf water and the white of the clouds we pass through and above... My father always said the ground below, the way it is cut out in blocks, in sections, was like a (cubist, I would say) painting. And now I focus to see a human on the earth, and one in the heavens.)

My father, in fact, seemed to be recovering from spraining his knee, though far from completely. And it seemed to me that our going out to golf together that Saturday might serve as a good exercise. He, too, thought it might be a good idea to try it; but he didn't feel as well when the day came as he had the day and days before.

That morning as usual I was hurrying to get to the car and Mass on time. I had really only been using the car to go to Mass. Though my father was rather insistent that I also use it when I went up to school to type, I slipped out to the bus – which was very convenient and inexpensive – so he could have use of the car as he might need. I suppose this was another instance of a kind of disobedience; but I was very glad I had done so, particularly two days before his death when he spent what I could tell from my mother's account was a very enjoyable day together with her at the stores and to an unexpected lunch out. (It seemed even romantic.)

As I came into the kitchen, my father was seated at the table amongst all the items – medicine, cereal and bowl, etc. – he had so neatly laid out the night before. (I had noticed for the first time how well set up he'd gotten himself only in the middle of this night when I came into the kitchen for water.) I asked him in passing how he felt, but his answer wasn't a passing one. He just looked up at me with the most genuine expression of pain and disgust. I paused in my tracks, realizing I had not really taken close notice as to how he had been doing, and sort of hung around as he took his blood sugar level. As we waited for the results, I asked how it had been lately, and he said, "Not good. I just can't get a good reading." As I stood and waited the minute or so I prayed to myself for some good news. It came up "114" and he said, "Finally, a good reading." I left for Mass encouraged by this positive result.

Mass at a local church that day was for the deceased circus performers of the preceding year, and drew a sizable crowd. The Mass was said by a circus chaplain, in the town of John and Mable Ringling's estate. I found it curious to happen upon this Mass, and sought to speak with one of the circus priests afterward, just to mention the project – ten albums of lyrics, music, dance, and drama – I had completed years before, which had a rather circus-like, Christian stage action part to it.

Before that I went to Confession on this the first Saturday of the month – especially dedicated to Mary, of course. The primary sin I confessed was my failure to really be present and loving for my family in this time, in particular my lack of obedience to my father. Curiously the priest gave me the penance of praying for a particularly neglected soul in purgatory. This penance of praying for souls in purgatory had also been

my penance the week before, from a different priest, and, even more ironically, would be my penance for my first Confession upon returning home to New Jersey. What makes it more unusual is that I cannot recall ever getting this particular penance before in what must be hundreds of Confessions.

I searched for a soul to pray for that day and finally decided on John Lennon, the man who had for a time taken the place of my father in my life, until I woke up and realized what a good man actually is. I had particularly admired Lennon and his wife Yoko for what seemed an ideal love. Then one day I said to myself: "Wait a minute! This guy beat women, abused his body with drugs and alcohol, and was anything but totally faithful..." (though perhaps in his final years he may have changed). Then I looked at my father and my mother and their love which had endured so many years, and coming to my senses said: "That's love!"

It seemed strange to pray for Lennon on what would be the day of my father's death; indeed, afterward I sort of tried to switch my prayers that day to be applied to my father's soul – that he might have all the help he needed – though I suppose his soul was not quite as desperate as Lennon's and, really, the prayers offered couldn't, and I wouldn't have wanted them to be, brought back again. But somehow that Confession and the ensuing penance seemed particularly appropriate for my father's passage.

Also that morning I happened upon a First Saturday Holy Hour in the small chapel next to the reception desk where I went to seek a circus priest. The priests had just gone into a meeting and would be about an hour, so I entered the chapel and joined the few people there in recitation of the Rosary. It was really another unexpected blessing to

find the chapel open and the Sacrament exposed. (This is so Monday to Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but not on Saturday.) This, too, seemed particularly appropriate prayer in the Blessed Mother's name that gave me strength for this day and which I later offered for my father's soul.

I did not get to speak with a circus priest. I confused which one was the relevant party as they rushed to the parking lot and their next appointment. And by the time I returned home it was late morning, well past the time Saturday chores ordinarily begin. I hastened toward the vacuum, apologizing for my lateness, and it was only then that I learned my father had done my work the previous day. On one hand, it seemed a blessing, for it made the extended prayer in which I engaged a justifiable gift rather than selfish indulgence; but on the other and perhaps more important hand, it was something I felt strongly shouldn't have been done. I had no doubt it had been too much work for my father to accomplish.

Another tangent I see (excuse me): I spent seven years after college living with my parents virtually as a monk. I did not work most of that time, but did all the work around the house regularly. I returned to the house at the beginning of that time after my father had mentioned, "There hasn't been much light in this house lately." I am reminded of my trip to Florida the previous Easter (or was it Christmas?). One Saturday I went ahead with vacuuming the house despite my father's repeated angry protestations – I suppose he wouldn't have had me work while I was visiting, though I really had gotten into the habit of doing so. It was a few days before I was to leave. When I was about halfway through, he came into the living room area smiling, his cleaning rag in hand, and

said, lightheartedly, “What are you doing next Saturday?” But now it seemed too late to return.

And I suppose, after all, on my last visit I really didn’t act so terribly. I had, in fact, noticed myself showing significant patience with things around the house which I wasn’t used to, as well as with my father’s own impatience and misunderstanding.

We had lunch together, my mother, father, and I, at about 11:30 or so, and toward the beginning of our sandwich meal, a small but significant event occurred, which spoke to me much about my father’s condition. In the preceding couple of weeks we had enjoyed a couple of pleasant holiday dinners with my brother and his wife and daughter. On Christmas my mother cooked and we transported the food to my brother’s house where there was a little more room, and everything went well – except perhaps my leaving a trail of gravy on the carpet as I carried the turkey to the car. (My father questioned why I hadn’t gone out through the garage and therefore not encountered anything but tile... but my brother and his brother-in-law had come through the front door, so I was just following them.)

New Year’s Eve and especially New Year’s Day had been a little different. Both meals were fine – a clam and spaghetti dinner which my sister-in-law made for one and a wide spread of food my mother prepared for the other – but, again, a couple of small but significant incidents stand out in my mind. On New Year’s Eve at my brother’s, a bottle of seltzer overflowed as my father opened it; and then the next day at table in my parents’ house, my father knocked over a full glass of water just as we were beginning to eat. These were things my father did not do. They were things he would warn us against doing and chastise

us for doing afterwards, but he was never clumsy. He was always precise and careful. In addition, on New Year's Day, it was very evident to me (and to my sister-in-law) that my father simply wasn't feeling well. I could see it in his eyes, and in his movements.

Then, here at lunch on the day of his death, my father said, as he moved a bottle of soda to the side: "You better keep this away from me. I'm liable to knock it over." There was a pitiable sadness in his voice and in his sheepish expression. Again, quite unlike him. (As I write now I am in church on Good Friday.)

After lunch we still had a couple of hours before going out to the course. I went to my room to read or write or pray for a while, and reappeared about a half-hour before we were to leave, my forehead wrapped in tissue paper. My father, who was already getting dressed, made the comment that I looked like an Arab, but was genuinely puzzled shortly after as to why I had this toilet paper around my skull. I said to him, "Don't you know?" But he really didn't. Also quite unusual. (I had been suffering with pimples on my forehead for several weeks – something I'd never had before, even as a teenager – and thought the absorbency of the tissue might serve to draw the oils out of my "wounds".)

After getting the two pennies I needed to make \$6.42 – just enough for my golf game – I left my parents bedroom and got dressed myself. My father and I sat in the living room together watching George Bush give a speech on TV (as I recall, a somewhat inspiring one... perhaps there is hope for this country), the tissue still around my head. At about 1:55 we headed out to the car, probably about five minutes later than we should have.

In the garage, I couldn't find the shoes I'd spied the night before, so I just put another pair on. As my father drove to the course he seemed very distracted. He couldn't seem to understand the plan for the game. We were to get there early – five or ten minutes after two – and secure a spot for the less expensive rate, which began at 3:00 but for which the proprietor let players go out at 2:30 (lacking business as she was this time of year). My father kept saying we wouldn't make the less expensive rate, despite my repeated explanations. Often he would feign ignorance to get me to say or explain something, but this time his ignorance was sincere. (Again, so unusual.)

I did my best to change the subject, asking about the meaning of the name of the road we were riding, remaining patient with him but getting ever more anxious that we wouldn't arrive at the golf course on time. I noticed my father rubbing his stomach, something I had often seen him do in the past, but had not recently – this was a sign he was not well. He said, "I just can't seem to wake up," but, though I took note, I didn't become overly concerned, because he had said that a number of times before.

As my father parked in the lot, I was still on edge about the time, and so jumped out to get my clubs out of the trunk and go inside to reserve our spot. My father followed soon after, without his clubs, and went up to talk with the woman at the register. He was trying to get her to smile, but not getting anywhere, so I suggested to him that we just sit down and wait. I sat at a table near the register, he looked over at the small kitchen and asked if I wanted anything. I said, "No. But maybe you want a cup of coffee," thinking this might help him to wake up.

Another unusual thing then happened. After he got his cup of coffee, my father stayed at the counter, though I had fully expected him to join me at the table. He just sat there quietly drinking his coffee, not more than thirty feet away from me, and I kept saying to myself, “What the heck is he doing?” I was too anxious about sticking near to the register – a number of other groups had arrived and were waiting as anxiously as I for the word that we could go (we were first) – so I couldn’t join him... So we both just sat separately and waited.

My brother arrived about ten minutes later and came over to me first; not noticing my father at the counter, he initially thought he had stayed home. I said to my brother, “I don’t know what he’s doing over there,” and let him know the situation. He went over and sat with my father, and I sat anxiously alone. About five minutes before post time, I walked over to them and suggested perhaps they should get their bags. They said they probably ought to get the bags once they’d gotten the electric cart, and we left it at that.

At 2:30, as the check-in began, my brother went to his car and my father and I met at the register. I paid for myself and tried to explain that my father would pay for two others, but there was a slight confusion, which was enough for my father – who would have assumed pay the whole tab – to begin to get anxious. I got to the point and officiously paid my fee; then my father paid for himself and my brother and the cart. My father suggested I get the cart, but I was too attached to the idea that I should go out to the tee to reserve our first spot in front of the eight or ten other groups behind us. He was a little disgusted, but went out to give my brother the key to the cart.

I stood at the first tee for a good five or ten minutes, waiting for my father and brother to come as more and more players gathered beside me. I made some vague and vain explanation about my father needing an electric cart, but this didn't seem to alleviate the pressure imposed by those anxiously waiting. Finally, my father and brother drove up and I teed off – knocking the ball in the water – then suggested they might hurry. Oddly enough, my father, who is so often concerned about not holding others up, didn't seem anxious at all. They teed off and drove to their balls, as I rushed on foot to the water (carrying my light bag with but five clubs), and quickly hit another shot into it. Finally, I got on the green and rushed through a couple of putts to get out of the way, and we moved on to the next tee. (It is now Holy Saturday as I write, again in the church.)

Though my father and brother arrived first at the second tee, neither had shot or was ready to shoot, much to my chagrin; so I stepped up and hit the ball, then rushed down toward the right side, where it had gone near a tree. After I'd shot, my father said quite calmly and directly, "You've got everything right; you just need to keep from trying to lift the ball." In other words, let the club do the work. As he readied to tee off and I stood down the course a way, my father said to me, again quite calmly, that I shouldn't stand before other players... so I moved further to the side behind a tree.

My brother hit down near the green, but my father's shot was short (the strength of his swing had certainly suffered of late), so he was first to hit a second time. I went down to my ball off to one side of the green, and stood behind the tree it was near. After our second shots we were both within a few feet of my brother. It was as I strode toward the green remarking on this, I heard the cry of my brother.

“Dad! Dad!” was all I heard, and then turned instantly and ran to my father. The cart was only fifteen or twenty feet away from where I stood, so I was upon him quickly. His head was back and his eyes and mouth wide open. I immediately put my arms around him and began to cry, “O Daddy! My Daddy!” then soon started rubbing his back and pushing his chest. I didn’t really know what I was doing, but as my brother went to a nearby house to call for help, I started blowing in his mouth in addition to pushing his chest, alternately holding him in my arms and crying. (I thought I had felt him breathe once or twice.)

In a few minutes or so my brother returned and several other golfers had come down to where we were. There was a woman among them knowledgeable about CPR, so she instructed me to breathe into his mouth as she alternately pushed his chest. Someone said almost immediately that they could find no pulse, but we did not give up working as we waited – another ten minutes – for the ambulance to come. In between breathing into my father’s mouth (and during) I prayed as best I could, and called out a few times the Lord’s name. I seemed to notice another man behind and to the side of me praying as well. (This after his asking if there was a pulse.)

When the ambulance arrived, several emergency technicians worked on him for another good fifteen minutes. I stood nearby praying and crying, and trying to stay out of their way. I held my father’s head for a while as they worked, and at one point there seemed to be a ray of hope. My brother said he thought he saw color returning to his face, but as I stood with my arm around him and he said, “C’mon, Dad,” it was difficult to believe he would return again to us. The paramedics tried everything in earnest, but eventually decided to take him to the hospital.

They said it was to give him treatment he could not receive here. I was already rather a wreck from shedding continual tears, but while riding in the ambulance up front with the driver, I tried to compose myself and pray. It was just not possible though to keep from breaking down.

It seemed a long ride to the hospital, and the ambulance did not race as I am used to seeing them do in Jersey City. But I did not open my mouth to complain. At the hospital emergency room I was led by a social worker to a room around a corner, told nicely that I must let the medical personnel do their work, and convinced to leave my father alone by the suggestion that I might get in the way out on the floor. It seemed the social worker noticed how distraught I was, though I would later assure her I still had my senses about me.

In the small, quiet room alone as I waited for my brother to come from picking up his wife, I asked for water and opened a Bible that was lying there on a bureau. I happened upon the Book of Job, opening at a passage in which he is bemoaning his dark throes. I continued to pray for the soul of my father, falling down to my knees, tears still in my eyes, and wondered if I should get a priest, even though my father was not Catholic.

It was not long before a doctor came in to give me the official word: my father was dead. He spoke with a measure of compassion and understanding, as certainly did the social worker, too, but really, I couldn't hear much of what they said – and most of what they said I knew. I was not angry at all; I was quite polite. After the doctor left, I cried some more, and upon the social worker's return, I asked if I could say goodbye to my father.

(Now in the Octave of Easter I sit in another church before the exposed Blessed Sacrament and write.) As I entered the curtained area where my father's body rested, I wondered how I would leave there. I prayed over him and for his soul – Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be – and begged for his forgiveness while assuring him of my own. I drew the sign of the cross upon his forehead, and continued to talk to him, asking him to watch over us who are still here. For a measure of his wisdom I prayed, and bowed my forehead toward his own.

I didn't really know what to do, but I didn't want to go, so I started to run my fingers along the bottom of his feet. I suppose in me there was still some hope that he would awaken, and I thought if there were still feeling in his body, it would be here where the blood most gathers. (So often dead bodies have appeared to me to be breathing, so close to life... and perhaps they are not far from us.) I smiled and continued talking a moment or two, but eventually came to fully accept that he would not return. And I said my final good-bye, entrusted him to the Lord and His Mother, and left without turning around.

Back in the quiet room alone, I waited for my brother to come. The social worker stopped in and asked if I wanted to take my father's belongings, saying I could sign for them. She informed me of the process that would now be followed regarding my father's body, and left her card for me to call her when we'd figured out arrangements for a funeral and whether or not my mom wanted to pay her last respects. While talking with her I thought to call the golf course about my father's car. The social worker directed me to a phone book, and I sat (in the small room) to try to call, though I was sort of shaking at the time. I was unsuccessfully calling when my brother walked in.

His wife had not yet returned to their house, and so he was alone. He asked me what had happened. When I told him the news he seemed more surprised than I that our father had died. (He must have been praying for a miracle.) I hugged him and we cried, and he got angry with me for accusing myself of all the mistakes I had made, but, again, all these doubts and fears had to come out. Reflecting on the reading from Job I had found in the Bible, I thought to ask my brother to pray for our father's soul. He seemed to think I was being too worrisome, asking, "What did he ever do wrong?" But I was adamant with him that only the perfect go to heaven, and Purgatory is a difficult road we all must face alone... I wanted to be sure he would pray.

The next thought was the most difficult, of course, and just about overwhelming to my soul: How would we tell our mother? This question brought the worst of tears and caused me several times to fall to my knees – there seemed to be no way to do it. I knew I was not strong enough and I began to hope that maybe my brother's wife would be.

My brother did not wish to visit our father's body, and thinking our mother might not want to either, we decided to take his personal effects with us, so as not to have to return. Soon enough we were back out into the light of day searching for my brother's car, which we found about a block from the exit we left. I couldn't stop thinking and asking how we would tell our mother, and tears continually returned. I was a little concerned about my brother's ability to drive – I know I would not have been able to – but he managed all right through the traffic. During the ride, he said that this was a wake-up call for him, and I suppose none of our lives would be the same.

I was still very tense as we pulled into his driveway, after a ten or fifteen minute ride. My brother's wife was still not back from shopping, but he contacted her on her cell phone, and just told her to come home right away. I paced around, interchanging crying and asking what we were going to do, and trying to calm myself. I recall we wandered into his backyard for a few minutes, and there began a series of confessional statements by him and me, as well as later my mother. He told how he still has dreams of our sister rather regularly, and that just a few nights before he had been unable to sleep, carrying a premonition that someone might die. He also said that he had a dream when he first came down to Florida to live – about ten years before – that was the same as his experience of looking at our father die while sitting beside him this afternoon.

In the clear light of this sunny Florida late afternoon I also confessed my own remarkable experiences, particularly regarding our sister's death. I described to him how some twenty years ago when alone in San Francisco – the land of Sodom and Gomorrah for me at the time – one night I spent in deep prayer and meditation and tears, focused intently on questioning the cause of my sister's death. It had haunted me for a few years and my many inquiries among her friends and police and others never really satisfied me. No one had seen what had happened to her as she sat apart from her friends on an isolated hill or cliff, crying about her boyfriend's having broken up with her. There were rumors flying all about of her doing drugs – the autopsy turned up negative; of her boyfriend pushing her – he was nowhere near the scene; and, of course, of her jumping from the hill to her death. But no one knew and I favored the latter, knowing my own inclinations during my troubled teenage years.

She was not like I, though, and my father reminded me shortly after, as we stood near her grave (the time when he, too, made a confession, which he never repeated – that he had had a vision of my sister before being awoken the night she died of her telling him she was fine), that my sister had a trick knee that would give out without warning. I had witnessed this once, but could not believe it was the cause, in such darkness as I was. But this night in San Francisco, as I wandered aimlessly from my apartment building and into a nearby supermarket – still entirely preoccupied with the question which had haunted me so long – I stepped in line at the register. There was one customer in front of me buying a few things, and as I waited I stared blankly at the two young women standing behind the register talking. All of a sudden, without any warning, the girl behind the one checking items fell directly to the floor, right before my eyes. She got up shaking and asking what had happened to her... for she had never experienced anything like that before. And I had the answer to my prayer.

With this story I had hoped to assure my brother, but he didn't seem to have the same doubt as I. The baring of souls went on for several minutes, and I think we were still outside when my brother's wife arrived. Yes, because we came around the house and met her at her car, where she was about to carry in the food she'd picked up at the supermarket. We were still outside when we gave her the news – I think I said the words, I don't remember. She began to cry and my brother hugged her for a while. She had lost both father and mother many years ago, and a sister to cancer more recently, and this would be another blow she would have to absorb.

We went inside together and cried some more. I told my sister-in-law that I didn't have the strength to tell my mother, but it didn't seem she was very ready herself. I didn't want to leave the house, didn't want to make that five-minute ride to where my mother sat without an idea of what we knew. But, after falling to my knees again a time or two, we eventually found ourselves in the car.

We just went. We just drove, I suppose. There was never a darker moment. No one knew what we would do. But when we pulled into the garage, I just cried out through my tears that I was just going to go in and hold her... I came out the back seat ahead of my brother and his wife, and quickly went through the door. But in the little laundry room before my parents' bedroom, I fell to my knees once again, and the hardest, momentarily unable to go on. Then, my brother and his wife behind me, we all entered the room in tears, and I went directly to the chair, her chair, threw my arms around her, and held her there (again on my knees), my head to her stomach and crying, "Mommy!" I don't know who told her, or if anyone told her, but soon she was shouting my father's name and saying, "No! No! No!"

Several minutes we spent in tears together there as the sun set and darkness fell upon the house. By the time we made it all into the kitchen, the house was completely dark. I had not known such darkness, and lack of breath, as now. Though the four of us were there together, I felt as if we were so alone, so empty. Finally, I thought to call our relatives, my mother's sisters first, and this brought a breath of fresh air. It would be my refuge and consolation the next few days to be on the phone talking to relatives and my father's friends, hearing invariably what a good man he was and how all would miss him.

I asked my two aunts to come down as soon as they could. (One lives in the same complex as my parents but was up North visiting her children; the other still lives in New Jersey.) They would fly down together in a few days and end up living with my mother for a good two months – a great consolation. When I spoke to my aunt on my father’s side who lives in Sarasota (the same city as my parents), she asked if I wanted her to come over. I said I didn’t know, but maybe it would be a good idea. She had lost her husband, my father’s brother, several years before, as suddenly as my mother had now lost my father. (A cousin, this aunt’s eldest, would tell me later that he believed we have an inherited problem with the heart.)

Before my aunt’s arrival, the four of us wandered about aimlessly, sort of in a daze, shocked as we were. I continued to question what could have been done to prevent this happening, blaming myself still, yes, but also questioning why my father’s stress test had been put off for so long. Perhaps if it had been just a few days earlier, problems he was experiencing would have been discovered, and this could have been prevented... But the repeated conclusion was that there was nothing we could do about it now, and so a certain acceptance of what is began to sink in.

A particular moment of light for me came when my mother declared the simple truth that “We all have to go some time.” The simple realization that death indeed comes to us all sooner or later turned my vision to the afterlife and away from the problems we were experiencing at the moment. I felt a comfort knowing that this world is passing, and tried to convey that sense to the others.

One point that would be made several times over the following days was that it was fortunate that my brother and I were with my father at the time of his death. I was glad not to have been all the way up in New Jersey – for then I would have felt truly alone – and there was nowhere I would have rather been at the time – but at the moment it was very hard to completely agree, since the shock of seeing him die before me was still fresh in my mind.

My brother the next day would say it was all he could see all night. I related to him that one of our cousins experienced the same for a long time, and tried to comfort him with the fact that what we see is not the reality, and with the reminder that my father didn't look much different when he would fall asleep on the couch after work or watching TV, his mouth wide open and him snoring away... He seemed to understand what I said and to begin to see through the physical appearance.

When my aunt arrived, she, my mother, and I sat around the kitchen table and talked. My sister-in-law joined us a little later. My brother remained mostly in the living room. My mother made coffee and tea, and brought out from the refrigerator an ice cream cake she'd purchased for me. We had had one after a holiday dinner and I'd said I liked it, as did everyone else, so she got another. My aunt ate a little; I intended to, but couldn't really bring the fork to the plate. (I would leave the tea lay there, forgetfully, as well.) I did talk, though, and with animation. Here began a discussion which would arise a couple of times later on, in particular with my two aunts whose husbands lingered a long time with debilitating illnesses. It was suggested that it is better if your loved one go quickly than to have an extended sickness. I disagreed with this logic, not believing such shocks as I knew with my father's sudden

death to be healthy. I believe, reflecting somewhat on my experience visiting nursing home patients regularly, that there is a certain wonderful compassion found in being with a loved one as they gradually die.

I told the story of my greatest shame: that when my sister was in a coma (for three days) I had the thought that if she had revived and had to live with brain damage, as the doctor suggested, perhaps it might be better for her not to awake. It was the most selfish notion this most selfish person has ever had, and I regret it more than anything. Also, when I later inquired directly of my two aunts if they would have rather their husbands died any time in their period of sickness (at least a couple of years each) – they could not hide that they did not regret a moment. One aunt told of how her loving husband would sometimes ask if she would just sit by him for a while. (We have no cause to hasten death. Every moment of life is precious.)

We also began to discuss more practical matters regarding my father's funeral and burial. My father was not Catholic and did not attend any other church, though he would sometimes go with my mother to Mass. (He had, in fact, attended Mass New Year's Day – just a few days before his death.) At the suggestion of his brother, whom I spoke to on the phone, as well as my mother, I called the pastor of her church to inquire about a service. He said we could have a Mass for him there. Also, at my request, he suggested a funeral director.

This brought a more difficult question to the fore: simple burial or cremation? My father had mentioned cremation a number of times, but, as my mother said, nothing definite had been set. I suggested that perhaps he just wanted to avoid causing anyone the problem of shipping his coffin up North, where he would be buried with my sister. I said if this

were the case that I didn't mind taking responsibility for the body on my return to New Jersey; in fact, I made clear I preferred he not be cremated. My aunt seemed to understand what I was saying, but the idea wasn't getting support from anyone else. My mother was leaning toward cremation but agreed to sleep on the question and decide in the morning. (I did contact the funeral director, though, as well as the hospital to let them know my mother did not intend to visit my father's body, in addition to giving the name of the funeral home.)

It was, I think, after 8:00 and I began to get concerned about my aunt driving home in the dark. We offered to drive her home and pick her up again the next day, but she said she was fine, though she shouldn't stay too late. My brother and his wife did not stay too long after she had left. My brother said he'd pick me up and take me to get our father's car at the golf course, probably before 9:00 Mass, though there was some uncertainty because my mother wasn't sure if she'd be able to go to church. I had told the funeral director we'd meet him at about 10 a.m., or after the 9:00 Mass had ended. Before my brother left, he and I stood around for a few minutes in the garage where my father had spent much of his leisure time painting, smoking cigars, listening to the radio, or cleaning his golf clubs. I think we looked for a while at his paintings, which covered the walls. My brother pointed out one that he would like to have; I just really wanted his self-portrait.

As my brother pulled away, I imitated my father's voice, saying, "Take it easy, Bro," using the name he'd call my brother in a black slang street voice. Soon I was back in the house with my mother, alone. She had started rather nervously throwing little papers and things of my father's away, but eventually calmed down a little and sat with her book

of crossword puzzles, to keep her mind off matters. I couldn't do much. I recall lying down on the couch for a short while, thinking I might sleep there for the night, rather afraid at the time to go into my room alone. But I kept periodically checking on my mother, who'd gone to her chair in her room, shadowing her to make sure she was all right.

It was during one of these forays into her room that we began a confessional conversation similar to the one I'd had earlier with my brother. She remarked that in the afternoon, about the time of my dad's death, she had been thinking much about Lynn. She had even taken a large picture of her and placed it prominently on her bureau. She also said she had herself had a dream of Lynn, the night following her fall, wherein, again, she'd assured my mother she was all right. I told her Daddy had had a similar experience the night that she fell. She said she knew but didn't realize it had occurred the same night. I repeated the experiences I had discussed with my brother, and those he had told me.

Some time this night or the next I came to my mother and told her that if she really needed me, I would be here for her. I had nothing necessarily holding me in New Jersey anyway, and could move without much difficulty. Seeing that my mother was taken care of was my main concern, and I would have to figure out the best way that could be accomplished. Certainly I thought about not teaching the coming semester and being here in the house with my mother. It would not have been my decision to move to Florida otherwise, but, as I say, it was certainly very possible.

What should I do? Thinking again, I realized if I did move down here there would be no real impetus for my mother to visit Jersey City, a place she still considered home and where she had a number of friends,

as well as other relatives who were in the area. My brother and his wife had been encouraging me to move down for some time, but I felt comfortable where I was, and, in a sense, felt called to stay in Jersey City, at least for now. This question would have to work itself out over time, particularly as I saw how my mother was doing.

I eventually made it into my room and fell asleep on the bed for an hour, with clothes and lights on. When I woke, my mother was sort of dozing as she watched TV, and I encouraged her to go to bed. I myself managed to take a shower, but, not feeling ready for a night's sleep, decided to do some writing instead. It had become my habit to read and write about the next day's Scriptures in the middle of the night, and rather than getting up again, I decided to do this work at this time.

The following day would be Epiphany, the celebration of the manifestation of the star to the wise men and their coming to discover the king who was born. It held particular significance and comfort for me, for perhaps my principal thought and concern now was the state of my father's soul. I had been greatly reassured of blessings upon him when my brother told me in the little room at the hospital that the man who was praying over our father as he sat dying was a deacon of the Catholic Church. (I fell to my knees in tears for this grace.) And now what consolation I took to realize that those wise men who came from the East were not Israelites, yet they sought the Lord in earnest, and found Him in the manger. For if it could be so with these, certainly the blessing of the Lord could come to my dad, a wise man though not Catholic.

In fact, upon waking the next morning at sunrise, what a beautiful sense of peace filled my soul and how my mind was lifted by the coming

light. Already I sensed healing of my own wound and distinct hope for my father's plight. At Mass this morning that healing would find a fulfillment, as I sat (and knelt) toward the back of the church beneath the stained glass window of an accused Mary Magdalen and the Lord's writing in the sand. Here I prayed for forgiveness of my father and offered the Mass for his soul. And here came the reassurance I so desired.

Before Mass my brother had driven me to pick up my father's car. (I remember my upbeat departure from him as I entered the car to drive, and how I was behind my brother most of the way to church... drawing breaths that kept me going forward on the road this misty morning.) After Mass, I paused before the Blessed Sacrament for several minutes – to offer my father's soul to God, to entrust him to His grace and forgiveness – and so I was a little late in meeting my mother (who could not go to Mass) and my brother and sister-in-law at the funeral director's office. They were all gathered around his table when I arrived, and had decided on cremation. I kept to my resolution not to dispute my mother's decision, and soon we were looking at different types of prayer cards for the funeral. My mother chose a Holy Family prayer.

The funeral director was very nice, and after hearing the stories of the tragedies of his life, I could not help but think our situation nothing to bemoan. (He, too, lost a daughter, in a terrible car accident, and then had to deal with the unjust suit of the parents of one of her friends in the car. He was exonerated and asked no remuneration for his trials, including a severe heart attack at table one night.)

At breakfast following our meeting, I found the physical and mental strength to match my growing spiritual health. I ate with an appetite my breakfast meal, and was pleased that my mother ate a little, too, as did

my brother and sister-in-law. It was here I realized, too, that I would be able to return to New Jersey to teach for the coming semester, as the way in which my mother would be cared for began to clear up. Of course, my brother and his wife (and her daughter) were always in town, but I did not want my mother to be alone in the house. She had spoken with one of her sisters this morning, and she had said she was moving into the house with my other aunt who was coming, and they were staying as long as she needed. (This care for my mother would be confirmed when I picked up my aunts from the airport a few days later and they encouraged me to go home.) When my aunt from New Jersey left and if my other aunt visited North in the spring, my mother could come up with her – and we might even have a funeral Mass at that time for the people up North. Then I could be here all summer if need be. Things would have to be taken week to week and month to month, but I became confident that my mother would be well taken care of.

The funeral itself would not be until the following Friday. The meantime, as I've said, I spent answering the phone and speaking with relatives and friends of my father. (I was very cheered when one of my father's golfing buddies let me know how often they would commiserate about their children. He had a son for whom spiritual matters were most important as well... he left a lucrative job to become a deacon.) And it was a great blessing to speak to those from whom I'd been apart for a while.

In the intervening time I would also go twice to the department stores to find clothes for the funeral – the next day with my mother, then with my “three mothers” after my two aunts had arrived. We exchanged an almost new jacket of my father for one that fit me, and finally settled

on a pair of pants. And I would also try to drive around these three sisters (none of whom drive themselves) as much as I could before leaving a week after the funeral.

Also during these days leading up to the funeral, I began to make mental notes of comments people made about my father and to piece together strong memories of his life. This became a reflection I'd offer at the end of my father's Mass, written late Thursday night. (I will append it here.) People seemed moved by the words, and certainly I was brought to tears by much of what I had recorded. I concluded with my Polish grandmother's comment, spoken when my mother had brought my father home the first time and said he wasn't Catholic. She said, "But he's a good man." I then added, rather spontaneously, in words spoken to my father, "Dad, you were good to us all. We pray the Lord is good to you now in heaven with Lynn."

I picked up my father's brother and his wife from the airport the day before and we passed the hour's drive home discussing family stories, mostly about my great grandparents, about whom I've always been fascinated: he was a Protestant sailor who came home with her brother on leave to their very Catholic household. They fell in love and promised to marry, but he died at sea a few months later (taking her brother's place on a mission), and she died in childbirth after having to tie herself down that she might not show her condition.

I was most pleased to see a couple of cousins who lived on the East Coast of Florida. They arrived with my aunt and another cousin, whom I'd seen a few years before, but these two I hadn't seen in ten years or more. When I saw them it was like drinking in a great delight – I could not take my eyes off of them. They were the only cousins who were

able to make the funeral, and I hadn't realized how important it would be to have those who were my age there for this day.

The day of the funeral went well. The large chapel was half full of people for the Mass itself. (The priest was surprised to find close to a hundred people for a funeral he expected to be sparsely attended.) And in addition to seeing relatives for the first time in a while, I was rather overjoyed to meet the large number of my father and mother's friends and acquaintances who had come for the Mass. I smiled broadly to greet each one as they left the chapel and to hear of their love for my dad. (How tears and laughter commingle so well on these special days, as they had indeed in this same chapel for my brother's wedding but a few years before... I so distinctly remember my father's observant comment at the kitchen table after my sister's funeral, as so many good people gathered, that it seemed strange to be so happy on this day of mourning.)

The family members had dinner together in the gathering room at a Dutch restaurant, then everyone convened at my mother's house. While at the restaurant, walking around the gift shop and sitting outside the dining room before and after eating, I took refuge speaking with my father's brother, who, though a year or two older, is often mistaken for his twin. It was much like my father were still with me as we discussed the many problems besetting modern society in its loss of love and the breakdown of the family. (Could we really have aborted a third of a generation in this profligate country?) Then, back at the house my time was occupied by the fair distribution of my father's paintings to aunts and cousins.

I had hoped to give each family, if not each member, a token painting by which to remember my father, and had begun the night before by providing a few to my cousins and aunt who had come from the East Coast. My mother's sisters had several paintings in mind for themselves and their children, and my other two aunts on my father's side also found suitable mementos. After everyone was done I rearranged the remaining paintings some, so there wasn't empty space for my mother to look at and perhaps be saddened by.

People did not stay long. My father's brother had to catch a plane home, for he and my aunt were going to their son's the next day and then soon after on the cruise my parents were to have accompanied them on. My other aunt on my father's side drove them to the airport. And my cousins had a long drive ahead, so they were soon off, my female cousin wearing a black and white hat of my father everyone agreed looked great on her. And so, soon all was over. (I think it was actually not until now, as my brother and I stood around in the garage, that I finally threw the bucket of dirty water with which my father had washed the floors the day before his death – a week ago – into the grass in front of the house.)

My brother and I spoke of going golfing, and we would end up doing so on Sunday. It seemed strange, but I thought of it as a kind of prayer. As we prayed for a short time at the place of my father's death, it was odd to find the used plastic covers of syringes and other material still strewn about in the grass. As for the game itself, I did not play badly, but for my brother it seemed everything that could go wrong did, and more, as he managed to hit every obstacle in our path. I suppose it was a test of his patience, which he – as all – struggles with at times. We made it to the seventeenth hole before giving up for the day.

I waited until Tuesday to make my reservation to fly home that Thursday. The airline was very considerate, allowing me to make my return flight any time. (They only needed the name and number of the funeral director.) And the final few days in Florida I continued to drive my mother and aunts to any necessary places. My mother was in good hands now and would show herself to be strong in the coming months.

A few unmentioned memories occur to me now: on the second day after my father's death, I was driving to daily Mass in the early morning. The fog was so thick I could barely see half a block. It felt as if I were driving into heaven... I took my mother to Mass a couple of days later, before meeting with the priest to discuss funeral arrangements. She had been a little afraid to go to Mass for fear that she would cry, as usually she does in such circumstances – but remarked afterward with a distinct measure of incredulity that she had not done so and couldn't understand why. I suggested that it might be her understanding and acceptance of God's will and my father's being in good hands. And another thought that stays with me is my father's remark after eating a banana a day or two before he died. My parents didn't really buy bananas, but they bought them for me to have each morning with my cereal. For several days both had been commenting on how black the bananas were getting, and despite my assurances that they were just becoming ripe, they continued to worry that they were going bad. Since there was one more banana than I'd need, my father eventually took one for himself. He couldn't believe how sweet it was and that there wasn't a mark on it. I pray my father was so ripe for heaven.

Here I will end this account as I await my mother's summer visit with me in New Jersey. Finally, I will recall a dream I had the night after my father's funeral. Generally I have been at peace with my father's dying since the feast of the Epiphany the following day. But this night I was troubled and fearful. I could not fall asleep for some time with the doubtful questions upon my dark soul: Was he bound for heaven? Would I see him again? How much has he to suffer by the grave? And when I fell asleep I had a reassuring dream.

I was at my father's funeral, or what was at first a practice for his funeral, not in the chapel where it had actually taken place, but in a church up North. I was toward the back of the center aisle waiting for friends who would serve as pallbearers. It was time and they hadn't arrived, so a few men, perhaps from the funeral home, began to carry my father's casket from the middle of the aisle toward the front.

I thought, "But my father was cremated. Why is there a casket?" I decided the cremation must take place afterward... Anyway, as the casket was carried forward, the funeral became actual. In the casket at the front of the church someone said they saw my father's body, wrapped in cloth like a mummy, breathing. It couldn't be! I seemed to see him breathing as well, so I tore a small piece of cloth from where his nostrils would be, and indeed he was breathing! We unwrapped him quickly and he sat up. As he began to explain, rather matter-of-factly, the difficulties he'd gone through - "Let me tell you, you wouldn't believe it..." - I took him in my arms, held him to my chest, and cried, "O Daddy! My Daddy!"

Epilogue

The night before the burial of my father's ashes I again found myself troubled, this time regarding the fact that my father had been cremated, that it was not his body we were burying. I had carried my father's ashes with me on the plane up from Florida, the box nestled amongst my clothes in my carry-on bag. (How strange.) And for the few days before the burial I'd had to keep his ashes in my dresser drawer.

I worried how he would be raised from the dead: Would it be more difficult now? What about the saints whose bodies never decay? Doesn't this show the sacredness and necessity of the body itself...? But I remembered Ignatius of Antioch's desire to be crushed like the dust for Jesus' sake; and then in a kind of dream a sister/friend came and held my hand, and my heart was soon at ease again.

It was January 21st, Martin Luther King Day. My friend, who is actually my father's age and was a friend of his, picked me up in his van. As we drove to get our priest friend who would perform the burial service, I felt uncomfortable leaving my father's ashes on the back seat; even more did I worry to leave them in the car as we went into the rectory to have a cup of tea. But soon we were on the road again, just the three of us – I did not think to invite friends or family, concerned primarily with getting the ashes into sacred ground as soon as possible.

Quite marvelously, and as something I took to be a blessing of God, it began to snow as we drove to the cemetery. Lightly at first, and then more heavily. By the time of our arrival, it was snowing very hard.

(I had to cover my head and the box as I went into the office to check in.)
At the grave there was a layer of snow on the ground, what seemed to be a restful blanket for my father's repose.

The three of us gathered under a single umbrella as Father led the service and we answered the prayers and read as instructed. The service was short and simple, though thorough, and for me very poignant. We then each took a turn shoveling dirt on the grave before the workers filled in the few feet of space surrounding the box containing my father's ashes. Quickly the snow covered the earth above my father's resting place.

A few months later, shortly before a spring visit to my mother in Florida, I called the monument company to find out if my father's name had been inscribed on the headstone yet and if I could pick up the deed to the plot. The secretary left a message saying I could pick up the deed but it would still be a while before the name was carved.

The day before my departure, just a few days later, I went to the cemetery. As I stood praying at the plot of my grandparents and an uncle, a few rows before my sister's grave, I looked up and noticed my father's name on my sister's headstone. I smiled immediately, a strong sense of comfort upon me. Here my father had found the home he had desired for so long, with his daughter in eternity.

June 5, 2002

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart

St. Anthony Church, Union City, 3 p.m.

(before the exposed Blessed Sacrament,

and now having walked the Stations of the Cross for my father's soul)

Appendix:

Reflections On A Good Life

(Delivered at Harold B. Kurt's funeral, January 11, 2002)

I'm just going to give a few reflections of my father, principally through the words of his family and friends, most spoken in the last few days.

First of all, as my mother said while showing her wedding picture to friends: "He was so handsome." She also added later that she would always tell him he was handsome, "even though he was bald." And my Aunt Hilda said she would tell her husband Ewald, my father's brother, "Even though you two look the same, Harold is better looking." (Sorry, Uncle Ewald.) He even had long, curly blonde hair as a child.

Second, my friend Steve, who has a way with words, called him "The Amiable Mr. Kurt", and his friend Carl called him "Sunshine." Like my sister Lynn he would talk to anyone and everyone, and make friends. My Aunt Jean said of him, "He always made you laugh" and, I think we'd all agree, "He could talk." My dad was usually the life of the party. My cousin Mark, another comedian, said he got his inspiration from my dad. I remember at my cousin Matt's wedding my father wearing the flower from the table behind his ear and another time, while leaving my aunt's house one Christmas, his pretending to blow out the electric lights on the Christmas tree again and again, and everyone laughing, again and again.

But my dad had a very reflective and artistic side. He spent a lot of time alone reading and especially painting – where hours would go by unnoticed. My cousin John, an artist himself, remembers well our trip with him to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He was at heart a very quiet man, and, I know, a very wise man, who always knew the right thing to do. My brother Kenny called him his “rock”.

Not that he didn't get angry. He did. But he never stayed angry. I believe I learned how to forgive from my father. As much as he might scold my brother or me when we'd done something wrong, when I'd see him the next day (very anxious and afraid), *he* would be smiling, as if nothing had happened.

I think his smile was his best feature. He could light up a room full of people, or a room with just two people. My brother Kenny, who was never very fond of school, remembers him coming into our room early in the morning on days he was on vacation and pretending to blare a trumpet, calling us to get up for school – all the while smiling or singing the Robert Hall song.

Mornings my father was most alive. He confessed to me once he couldn't wait to get up and go to work, especially when he was younger. He had to wake about 3 a.m. to be in work at the Wonder Bread plant before 4, the first of all the delivery men to arrive. He was a good worker. “So conscientious,” my mother said, even “not taking days that were due him.” (He was also a good worker later in life, when he became chauffeur for my mother and my aunts.)

One of my favorite witnesses to my father was by a fellow worker at the man's retirement dinner. He said in his speech that there were days he just didn't want to be at work, but when he met my father – smiling in the early morning dark – it would pick him up and get him through. And he was always smiling when he came home from work, too, picking us up and rubbing our soft faces against the stubble of his late-day beard.

I guess I have to mention he was a golfer, and a good one, starting at age seventeen. He liked boxing, too, and smoking cigars. He enjoyed fishing with my cousin Gary and, of course, with his brother Al; and my Uncle Ewald mentioned that I shouldn't forget the summers these brothers from Jersey City spent together as teenagers working on a Vermont farm. I also have to say how proud my dad was when my sister-in-law Terry, whose father passed away when she was only nineteen, asked him to walk her down the aisle when she got married to my brother, and how much he loved his granddaughter Stephanie.

I seem to be going on a little long – I guess I am my father's son after all. But finally: his *goodness*. My mother said, "He was always good to me." My Aunt Irene said, "He was more like a brother than a brother-in-law." And when my mother first brought him home to meet her mother, a very religious woman, and said, "But, Ma, he's not Catholic," she simply replied: "He's a good man."

Dad, you were good to all of us. We pray now the Lord is good to you, in heaven with Lynn.