

If I Could be Like Laura

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My 16-year old daughter buried her friend Laura a few days ago – literally, she helped fill in the grave.

The next day at the memorial service, Laura’s pastor began by addressing the Class of 2017. He needed to help them make sense of things and let them know they’re not “cursed” as some have thought. You see, death has claimed four of my daughter’s classmates since 8th grade, all friends.

Experienced in small town Wyoming, really from any perspective, that’s far too many young lives thrust unexpectedly into eternity. Each time opening new and old wounds for those left behind. Each hurt raising again questions about the meaning of life in relation to suffering and death.

Questions whose resolutions can only be appropriated when one embraces the totality of the Pascal mystery. Yet, even that yields answers not bereft of a degree of tension, because our Lord’s passion, death and resurrection challenge us to hold close and live out our Faith when it seems like there is little to trust and times are dark.

Actually, living out one’s faith in Christ from this perspective is what the Easter season we just concluded was calling us to. It begged us to understand we are each a beloved child of God, no matter what we have done, or life has thrown at us, or even where we are in the spiritual life. And, because of His love for us, God is willing to do whatever it takes to lift us from where we are to be united to Him, and He sends His spirit to help.

In return, we must freely choose God and strive to be united to Him with thoughts and actions in accordance with His will. This means accepting the fact sin puts a gulf between us and God that can ordinarily only be bridged through the saving action of Christ manifest in our Baptism, and afterwards when we fall through our contrition brought to the Sacrament of Penance. But, it also means living out the Gospel each day.

It is all very mentally, physically and spiritually challenging. But, this is the hope of our salvation. That death is not the end when we walk in the light of Christ and live out in real and tangible ways our Love of God and neighbor – dying to self so the other may live. It is what Christ did in a supreme way on the cross. It is what we are called to do when Jesus says, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and up his cross and follow me” (Mt 16:24).

My last column discussed the fact that all Christians are called diakonia – serving others as Christ would serve them. The heart of that service is rooted in the Cross of Christ; the Gospel

lived out to the point of self exhaustion. This is the call for all Christians and in a special way for ordained deacons. Men who must appropriate the Lord's Passion in their own lives – dying to self in the service of others, that they may become witnesses to the life giving power of the resurrection.

It's so very humbling – because as a deacon I know this, and yet I know I cannot do it on my own. It takes an active and conscious effort to put to good use the graces of ordination. And, often the Lord uses the meek to show us how it's done and inspire us. Laura and my daughter have done that for me.

Laura was an amazing young woman, grown beyond her years in spiritual insight and the ability to convey it in beautiful prose (*have a look at ceemyheart.blogspot.com*). She was a true disciple and evangelist God called home at a tender age, like so many great Saints. Her pastor even noted it was the first time he'd conducted a memorial service where the person for whom the service was offered pretty much wrote everything spoken. Words that spoke personally and eloquently to what a personal relationship with Jesus can mean in one's life. What it calls us each to do in the service of others, and how it gives understanding and even joy to those left behind after a loved one's death. Laura exemplified the Christian I want to become.

Yes, life and all the suffering that comes with it and even death have meaning. They put us intimately in touch with a God who loves us so much that He suffered and died for us, but also rose and sent us the Holy Spirit giving us hope. In doing this He shows how He understands what we each are going through at every moment of our lives; and that He does not abandon us, especially at our moment of death, or the death of someone we love.

I hugged my daughter and told her no kid should have to go through what she has the past few years. She looked up, tears spent and resolved to continue on, and hugged me hard.

Lord, may I someday be able hug my Father, then turn and embrace my cross, knowing He understands it all better than me, and better than any earthly father.