

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations in our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer; Amen.

I remember the day I met him like it was yesterday. I was sitting on the couch in my house next to my younger brother, Adam. I was eight years old and he was five. It had just been my Mom, my brother and me since our Dad left my mom when I was 2 and my mom was 7 months pregnant. We had met one or two other of the guys my mom went out with, but she said thought this was one different, somehow special and she insisted tonight was the night we would finally meet him. The doorbell rang and mom seemingly ran to the door to open it. When she did a man with jet black hair and a matching mustache and the biggest, goofiest grin I'd ever seen entered and embraced my mom. I immediately hated him. Who did he think he was coming in here and taking my mom away? And why was he hugging her?

She brought him over and introduced us. He said we could call him Buddy. He smiled big and told me how special my mom was, like I didn't already know that. I looked him square in the eye, as only a threatened eight-year-old girl could and I told him I hope he didn't have some grand plan to come in here sweep my mom off her feet and take her away from my brother and me. We were her kids and needed her more than he did or ever could. He smiled and replied, "Well of course I plan on sweeping her off her feet. I'll just take the two of you along for the ride." I was furious and in that moment, overcome with emotion, I hauled back and punched him. No sooner had my fist hit him than I felt my mother, who was clearly mortified, pick me up, take me to my room and give me one of the worst punishments of my life. In that moment I didn't care. I was so mad. I was so hurt. I was so scared. Little did I know how much that encounter would change my life, my family's life really, forever.

It turns out that Buddy, much like me, was pretty stubborn, and more specifically he was extremely stubborn when it came to my mom, having her in his life, supporting her, loving her, having her attention. He was determined that he was going to be with her for the rest of her life and he wasn't going to let some little girl with a bad attitude scare him away.

About a year later my Mom and Buddy got married and I got not only a dad, but I also inherited an older brother and sister from Buddy's previous marriage and he inherited my brother and me. Almost exactly a year later my mom and Buddy had a baby together, my youngest brother Eric. We truly were an all American blended family. Now, I'd like to report that from this point on we were a happy little family and we all got along perfectly all the time, but that wasn't the case. All of our lives have challenges and most certainly blended families have many bumps in the road. But what I'd like to share with you today isn't those challenges, what I'd like to share with you today what Buddy, or the person I knew as my Daddy taught me.

My daddy taught me how to support and love other people. He didn't have to show up at every soccer game, every soccer practice really, but he did. He didn't have to allow me to be on travel soccer teams, driving me up and down the east coast for games and driving twenty minutes across town to practice three times a week, but he did. He didn't have to be at every Handbell concert, every church play, every youth Sunday, every national honor society program, every awards ceremony, but he was. He didn't have to help me build bridges out of pasta for physics or the replica of the Champs-Elysees for French II, but he did. He didn't have to pay for my college at a private university, but he did. He didn't have to fly over to Alabama while I was on internship to help me patch holes in the walls in my apartment to keep the roaches out, but he did. He didn't have to love me, a step-child, but he did. He taught me that family is about more than blood, it's about seeing someone for who they truly are and loving them in spite of their

flaws and mistakes, Lord knows I have certainly lots of both. And that “step” is something you walk on and shouldn’t ever describe your relationship to a person.

My daddy taught me about dedication. He was dedicated to my mom, my family, his job of 47 years, the servers at restaurants he frequented, the mechanics at the shop where he had his car repaired, the bug man who serviced our house, the sales representatives he called when he needed something serviced. Once you had an interaction with my daddy, you became his people until you decided you didn’t want to be anymore, and sometimes even then he still claimed you.

My daddy was a lover. He cried at every single commercial about dogs in shelters or babies who needed to be adopted or who were hungry or homeless. He cried at every sappy movie. We used to joke that he would cry at an infomercial. And he wouldn’t allow you to leave the room without telling you he loved you. In fact, my pappy was never a man of many emotions. But somehow my daddy convinced my pappy that he needed to tell his family he loved them because he never knew when it would be the last time he would get to see them. And after that conversation, my Pappy did, too.

My daddy was determined. The fall before Simon was born we found out that my daddy had pulmonary fibrosis. It’s a lung disease that causes your lungs to shrink up over time, and eventually become non-functional. No one knows what causes it and there is no cure. The only option for an extended life is a lung transplant. So in January, after a battery of tests and after losing close to 100 pounds my daddy was placed on the transplant list for a single lung transplant. We knew it could be a while before he was transplanted and that there was a chance it would never happen. The average wait on the list was eighteen months and the doctors didn’t think he had that long. So we waited. And in November, on the first try which is also rare, my daddy received the gift of a lung, the gift of an extended life, from a 17-year-old teenage girl

who was in a car accident in Miami. Daddy prayed for that girl's family in thanksgiving and for their loss, every day for the rest of his life; a true life story of witnessing what the body of Christ can do together when they are working together.

After he was transplanted daddy had many good days and many challenging days, but for each day we were thankful. During a complication one year after transplant they did a chest scan and found out the lung he was born with had completely shriveled up. We knew each day was a gift. One thing people don't realize about transplants is that they truly are only a bandaid. It's only a temporary fix and eventually you will have to be re-transplanted. The average life expectancy for a lung transplant is five years.

My daddy was too young to die, but at the age 72 he made the decision to go on hospice. Hospice is so wonderful, but anyone who has ever had a loved one with a chronic illness knows how difficult it is to watch someone you love deteriorate. And while they are in hospice you are acutely aware that any single day may be there last. So many times I asked God, "Why my dad? There are so many fathers who hurt their children and abuse their wives. Why does my dad who was loved by so many and adored by his family have to be this sick? Why does he have to suffer? Why does he have to die?" So many times I asked God where he was. So many times I begged him to just take him so I didn't have to watch him hurt anymore.

But as I watched my daddy it obvious to me where God was. My dad did complain about pain don't get me wrong. But not once did he ask where God was. Not once did he ask why him. Not once did he say he wished it would happen to someone else. And every day he would say he was blessed by God to have the family he did, the home he did, the life he did. Through my daddy I saw God's presence in the hardship and in the tragedy. And 5 years and one month after

transplant my daddy finished the race that was set before him and he entered the church triumphant.

It is never easy for us to lose someone we love. It is never easy to permanently say goodbye to someone who has been so influential in our lives, someone who has loved us, someone who has helped to make us the person we are, someone who we don't remember the world without. But today that's what we are doing. And when I read our gospel lesson I wonder if God brought Lazarus back to life why can't my daddy come back just for one more day? I'm sure many of you have thought similar things about your loved ones. And then I realized, even Lazarus had to die. We all do. The mortality rate is 100%. Death is a part of life. And you can't have resurrection without death.

But as I have said to many of your loved ones and I remember saying to my dad. "What's the worst thing that can happen in this life?" You will die and go to heaven to sit at the feet of your maker and to be surrounded by all the saints, by all your loved ones for all eternity. That really doesn't sound so bad. And even though death really, really stinks for those of us that are still here on earth, and certainly stinks for the person while it's happening, I give thanks and rejoice in God's promise that one day, when God has finished preparing a place for me and for you he will come and take us to our forever home and pain and tears and sadness and anxiety will be no more. We will be as God intended us to be.

That's what we celebrate on All Saints day. We celebrate the saints who have claimed their eternal reward, but we also celebrate the saints who are still on their earthly pilgrimage, those of us waiting in hopeful expectation for the fulfillment of the resurrection. And today, we remember the one place where God promises us that we can be connected while we are physically separated, the communion table. So today, when you gather around the rail I invite

you to think of your loved ones who have gone to heaven. When you reach out your hands to receive the bread, see them doing it too. We are celebrating and remembering and hearing God's promises of love and mercy and forgiveness and eternal life together. And we are rejoicing in the words that God will say to all of us one day, "Come out!" Come out, be alive, and receive your reward. You are my precious child and I have claimed you as my own forever.

So let us be thankful and hopeful. Let us remember with fondness those who are at rest. Let us be assured that one day, one sweet day we will all be reunited at the feet of Jesus worshipping, and loving, and being happy and fulfilled. And until that day let us bask in God's promises and let us care for one another in all of our joys and sorrows. Let us be that cloud of saints, the cloud of witnesses God has called us to be.

Thanks be to God for the saints of light and the saints who surround us. Amen.