



Winter Theme ~

*Thoughts About  
Dying*

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## No Time Like the Present

by Kate Cabell

I first wrote this on January 10, 2014. I revisit it from time to time when it comes this time of year. It recounts the night my mother died in 1992 and the feelings I still experience remembering the night.

Twenty-two years ago tonight, which was also a Friday night, my mom had requested beef stew for dinner. She was in the end stages of emphysema and had practically quit eating. Happy and relieved that she had, at least for the moment, regained an appetite, I fixed it for her and spoon-fed her what was to be her last meal, although I didn't know it at the time. She died sometime in the early morning hours of Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup>. For many weeks, maybe months, every Friday night I relived the

evening—especially spoon-feeding her dinner and coming in to check on her and to hold her hand as she was slipping away.

I don't know why this particular anniversary, falling on Friday night/Saturday morning, has hit me so hard, but it's as if it had just happened. I'm sure that January 10<sup>th</sup> falling on a Friday has occurred numerous times since then, but this particular anniversary feels raw.

If you have not told any loved ones recently how much you love them and honor them, do it. If someone you love has a special request, then grant it. It might be your last opportunity to show your love. I am so grateful that my memories are of the warm and fuzzy type. They are painful to be sure, but not regretful.



Death came to her with the gentlest of sighs,  
Mid-sentence, it peacefully closed her eyes

Death came to him with ominous threat,  
Forcing a meeting with things left unmet

Some lives are born to wretched despair  
Into meaningless suffering too heavy to bear

Some lives are born directly to death  
With never a chance to take the first breath

Death kidnapped a child like a cosmic mistake,  
Mocking and leaving more death in its wake

After aging and ill, borne with grace from the start,  
Death, like a friend, led her home to God's heart

Death is a kiss, an embrace, a blow,  
Infused in the only existence we know

Like a needle through fabric, with life as its thread  
Persistently death weaves us all in its stead

We dread it, fear it, don't understand  
How such cruel pain is allowed from God's hand

We want it, need it, yearn for its peace  
When suffering has no other release

Beyond mortal seeing, compassion Divine  
Blesses death, and transforms it to life beyond time

Yet stays with us here, whether bidden or no  
To walk with us till we are called through death's door

Death entered the world with intent to bring low;  
God, in His infinite mercy, said No

And turned death around, overcame its defeat  
Whether chaos or calm, crushing or sweet

And made it the grace, by which alone  
We are welcomed back to our eternal home

# My Comfort Level With Death

by Lucy Miller

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Before I left Indianapolis last fall, a few people asked me why I was returning to the area where I had been born and grew up. I usually replied that I wanted to be closer to my burial plot and funeral arrangements. During my first visit to a new doctor, he also asked why I was returning to DeKalb County, and I told him I came home to die. More than my morbid sense of humor was at work in both replies. My final arrangements have been made for several years at the funeral home owned by former school mates in my hometown, and I will be buried in the cemetery of my home parish which is peppered with ancestors and family. I consider this my last big move, coming back to where I was born – full circle as Michele Oertel might say, or “womb to tomb.”

I don't think I spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about death, but I have been exposed to it since I was a child. Growing up in a rural, German-based, Catholic parish, I went to dozens of viewings of deceased relatives and other parishioners in local funeral homes, but more frequently in family homes. I memorized many carpet patterns kneeling on living room floors praying the rosary. If it wasn't a school day, my sister and I would often attend funeral masses in my home church. Since I was related to a large percentage of the parish, I became familiar with open caskets and somber Latin funeral rites and accepted death and its accompanying ritual as a normal part of life and faith.

When I was a junior in high school, I was surprised to learn that not all my friends and classmates shared my attitudes. The father of a friend had died suddenly, and another close friend asked if she could go with me to the funeral home. She told me this was her first experience viewing someone who had died. I was totally amazed that at age 16 she had never seen a corpse. In later years, I had other conversations with my contemporaries which reinforced the notion that my childhood experiences with the dead were not the norm.

My Catholic faith and early exposure to death sustained me later in my nursing career which focused on geriatric care in ECF's, day care, home care, and briefly, in hospice. Death is no stranger in these settings but is often anticipated, even welcomed. I was privileged to be a participant, often an active one, but also by maintaining silent vigil as someone returned to our Creator. I was most grateful to be at the bedsides of my mother and my sister as they died quietly in their own homes.



So, I am familiar and relatively comfortable with death, but where do I find myself at this stage of life, living closer to my funeral arrangements and cemetery plot and facing another birthday in a few weeks? Frankly, I have a bit of angst, due in part to fear of the unknown because while I know well the routines and the rites and rituals, my full trust in “going gently into the night” is not quite there. Delving into scripture helps immensely, especially Paul's writings and Jesus' Gospel assurances, and pulling up every comforting memory of the many, many funeral liturgies which I have attended; (I have always thought Catholics celebrate death best, especially homilies!). But I still worry that I have more to do while I'm here, and I don't have all my questions answered. Will I be greeted as a “good and faithful servant?” And, if so, will I refrain from responding, “Does that come with a promotion and raise?” and “Which mansion is mine?” So little time, and so much to work out.

***Pet peeve about death words:*** When did the norm change from saying “dying” and “died” to “passing” and “passed?” I don't get it. Christ didn't pass on the cross; He died, didn't he?



# Death

by Andrea Fleak

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Have you ever wondered what the shortest verse in the Bible is? The shortest verse is John 11:35, and it is just two words:

“Jesus wept.” But why was our great Messiah weeping? Jesus experienced what we all inevitably experience – the death of a friend, Lazarus. It is interesting that while this Gospel focuses so heavily on the divinity of Jesus, this short verse shows Jesus as so very human. Like Jesus, we too deal with death; we are surrounded by it. We see it every time we turn on the TV.

The news each night informs us on how many people died that day from COVID-19. We hear about the shootings or tragedies that happen each day and how many died from that. In our own community, we hear about the passing of fellow parishioners, family members, and friends. Death is very much a part of our life, and at times it is easy to become numb to it when it is not affecting us.

Lately I have been talking with my students about finding different perspectives.

To understand something, sometimes we need to be aware of our own perspective and try to see from a different angle.

When we think about a loved one dying, we often reflect on that person’s life. We think about the good that person did – maybe that was with family members; maybe it was something accomplished in a particular career; maybe it was community service. We think about the special little moments we had with certain people. We shift our perspective from thinking about their death to thinking about their life. Sometimes the death of a loved one causes us to have a different perspective

on our own life. We see how fragile this life is. If there is air in our lungs, then we know we are alive, but does that mean we are truly living? We search for what impact we are having and question how we are going to be remembered.

We are going on two years for this pandemic. While it has given us much to think about regarding death, it also has shown us something about life and what it means to live. Maybe most importantly, it has shown us what we value the most in life. We have a new sense of gratitude when we get to see someone we were away from for a while. We are grateful in a new way when returning to an office with coworkers, going to school, having lunch with a friend, and getting together with family. We have a new gratitude for good health when we or others we know have experienced illness. The pandemic has caused a shift in our perspective to be grateful for the special little moments in life.

We know how the story with Jesus and Lazarus ends: after Mary and Martha professed their faith in who Jesus was, Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, and he arose. I have been wondering lately why Jesus does this. Yes, He raised the dead to life, but why did He choose to do that?

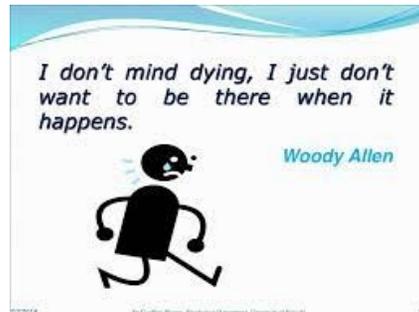
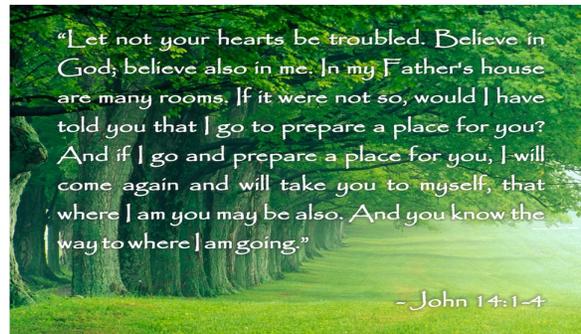
There is very little in the Gospels about Lazarus and his life other than that he was the brother to Mary and Martha and that he is from Bethany. We don’t know why Jesus brought him back or even what happens next. Maybe the *why* is what we need

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to take from the story. In this moment, Jesus showed us all that He has power over death and that, if we have faith, there is an everlasting resurrection.

As we get closer to Lent, we will have a lot of time to reflect on the passion and death of Christ and ultimately the Resurrection. May we remember that Christ has power over death and allow this to provide some comfort in times of loss.



If you enjoy writing and would like to submit an article, poem, etc., then please see the last page of this publication.

# Thoughts on Death

by Anonymous

2:35 AM: I was awakened by the sound of the phone ringing in the living room. I picked it up and heard, “Your father is failing. If you want to get here to say good-bye, you’d better hurry.” I rushed to get dressed and hopped in the car. What the nurse who called could not have known was that I was coming from over 40 miles away. Nevertheless, I made my best effort to get to Community East in Indianapolis.

But I did not make it. By the time I was able to get there, my dad was gone. I tentatively entered the room and there was his inert body, lying in the bed. I stood there for a while, looking at him, and I felt a great sense of remorse that I was too late. But I was relieved for him that his many years of suffering from COPD and heart disease were finally over.

I wanted to reach out and touch his hand, but I was afraid. I’d never touched a dead person before. And I wondered if one of the nurses had been able to be with him when he passed on.

This was my first experience of losing someone close to me. But it was not my last.

I was fortunate to have my mother with me for twelve additional years. When it was time for my mother to traverse the great divide into the next life, I was determined to be with her. She had been failing for a few months and at first, I encouraged her to try to recover and to return to her assisted-living apartment. As the weeks wore on, I gradually became aware that she’d had enough of the struggle. She wanted to move on.



We were at the hospital. She was experiencing congestive heart failure, struggling to breathe. My mother, always a God-fearing, spirit-filled woman, had a wild look in her eye. She was afraid because she could not catch her breath. I had no idea what to do to help her. However, my husband did. He took her hand and whispered to her that she did not have to be afraid. About an hour later, she finally was at peace. We stayed in the room for a little while. As we left, I reached out and touched her foot, saying good-bye to my dear, sweet mother.

I am grateful that I had these two experiences. They helped prepare me for what came next.

Several years later, we found out that my husband had an aggressive form of cancer. With intense treatment, he was told he might live an additional six months. By this time, he was already exhausted and decided it was not what he wanted to do.

We were both in a state of shock, but I respected his decision to refuse treatment. I knew he was ready to make his trip to the next life.

A few weeks later, we moved to a hospice where he could receive round-the-clock care. I felt fortunate that I was allowed to stay in the room with him. The first week, he was fairly aware of what was going on. We were even able to go out for lunch one day. But then, the inevitable took over.

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# Thoughts on Death

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The night before he died, I could hear that his breathing had changed. I could tell that it wouldn't be long. I crawled into bed with him and put my arms around him. Over and over again, I prayed the Hail Mary— not really praying the Rosary, but those two last lines seemed so meaningful then: “Pray for us O holy Mother of God...now and at the hour of our death.”

We stayed like that, until the sun finally came up. I was surprised that he'd made it through the night. It was Sunday morning.

Somehow, he hung on until the afternoon. Several of our friends from church came for a visit, and we were fortunate to have them with us when he took his last breath.

I know that in addition to our friends, the Lord, the blessed Mother, and our angels were with us. I am convinced that they were there to facilitate his peaceful passing. As for me, these experiences of losing my closest loved ones have encouraged me to look at death not only as an end, but a beginning. It seems more like going through a gate from this life to the next.



# Life and Death

by Richard Dufour

2003. In Indiana, Dick is divorced with two adolescent children. They live with their mother, a cancer patient for six years. In New Mexico, Dick's yearslong friend Lydia is corresponding about meeting in Chicago, where she will attend a conference. Lydia herself has experienced two troubled marriages and the death of her father in 2000.

## Inbox: re: Life and Death

Death: from [rld@bluemarble.com](mailto:rld@bluemarble.com), 13 March 2003

Lydia,

Today, Olivia, the youngest of my four children, turns 10. For six years of this beautiful child's life, her mother has battled cancer. Today, in the cancer wing of Bloomington Hospital, Olivia's mother is trying to face the reality of three new tumors in her chest.

A year from today, Olivia quite possibly could turn 11 without her mother. Because of what Olivia and her brother Dominic know is happening to their mother, I cannot think about a specific time in the future and not see myself grieving for them.

Your "dear friend" thinks of meeting you in mid-May, but as that is two months closer to some inevitable finality, dread and sadness fill me. To even consider my own future, during this time, brings on feelings of guilt.

It's a cruel, dark day today. You need not reply. I know you are there. Thank you.

Dick

Life: from [LTA@aol.com](mailto:LTA@aol.com), 13 March 2003

Hi, Dick,

We are all human beings trying to figure life out, so let's stick together because I like you, and sooner or later I am going to need you to be my support.

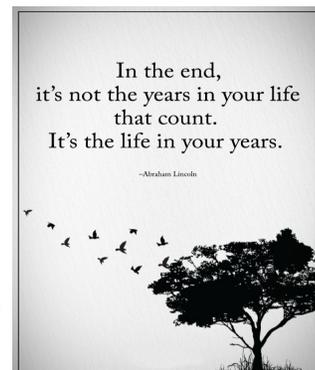
You gotta let people put energy in their emotional bank with you. There is a difference between asking, "Can you stand by me while I work on helping myself," and demanding that someone make it all better for you. You have hardly even asked and certainly not demanded or expected it.

I also think that when one truly experiences and comes to resolution with the sorrows and griefs of life, one opens up to a wider sense of being. It's about compassion—a word, you will note, that contains in it the word "passion." Being alive means sometimes being deeply sad, or charged up mad, as well as crackling with vibrant creativity or dancing with joy or being in love with everything. I mean damn, Dick --- isn't life amazing?

I am just so grateful I get to be here, now. I had to struggle with my own shadow self for so long that I finally know, deeply know, with every cell of my being, that life is a divine, wondrous playground. So, all this is to say: Play with your kids. Cry really hard when you feel like it. Laugh uproariously. Run until your muscles collapse in a tingling mass of vibration. Turn up your car radio and sing at the top of your voice. And talk to your friends.

Come talk to me in Chicago. See you soon,

Lydia



*Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep*

by

*Mary Elizabeth Frye*

Do not stand at my grave and weep,  
I am not there, I do not sleep.  
I am in a thousand winds that blow,  
I am the softly falling snow.  
I am the gentle showers of rain,  
I am the fields of ripening grain.  
I am in the morning hush,  
I am in the graceful rush  
Of beautiful birds in circling flight,  
I am the starshine of the night.  
I am in the flowers that bloom,  
I am in a quiet room.  
I am in the birds that sing,  
I am in each lovely thing.  
Do not stand at my grave and cry,  
I am not there. I do not die

**Brain cells die, skin  
cells die, even hair  
cells die.**

**But FAT CELLS... must  
have accepted Jesus  
Christ as their Lord and  
Savior because they  
seem to have eternal  
life.**

# Where 0 Death is Your Sting?

by Mark Hudson

Recently while cleaning out my parents' house, I ran into a copy of our parish's 100th anniversary celebration directory published in 2009. As I was looking over the pictorial of parishioners, I became solemnly aware that so many have died in these short 13 years. This naturally included my parents (Dad died in 2015 and Mother last fall.) But then there were pictures of neighbors (some with whom I served on various parish committees), members of prayer groups, and fellow golf buddies. This was just another reminder that we all die.

Sister Helen Prejean, when discussing her work with individuals awaiting their death sentence, said that we humans deny our own death. We think death is for somebody else. We have difficulty accepting our own mortality. The Church has a few ways of prompting us to be cognizant of our own passing. The Ash Wednesday ritual of placing ashes on our foreheads is a visible reminder of our own death. Biblical readings such as Matthew 15:13, "Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour" and 1 Timothy 6:7, "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," are solemn reminders of our humanity. Here at Our Lady of Lourdes parish, the November tradition of remembering those who died within the past 12 months with their names on huge scrolls hanging from the pillars in church puts us on notice that one November our name will appear on those scrolls.

Death is inevitable. We should learn to accept it. We experience it in different ways through our life journeys. The author, Dutch priest Henri Nouwen, wrote these following insightful words about death being a constant occurrence throughout our lives:

**"Life & death are not opponents but do kiss each other at every moment of our existence—**

When we are born, we become free to breathe on our own but lose the safety of our mother's body;  
 When we go to school, we are free to join a greater society but lose a particular place in our family;  
 When we marry, we find a new partner but lose the special tie we had with our parents;  
 When we find work, we win our independence by making our own money but lose the stimulation of teachers & fellow students;  
 When we have children, we discover a new world but lose much of our freedom to move;  
 When we are promoted, we become more important in the eyes of others but lose the chance to take many risks;  
 When we retire, we finally have the chance to do what we wanted but lose the support of being needed;  
 When we have been able to celebrate life in all these decisive moments where **gaining & losing, that is, life & death, touched each other all the time**, we will be able to celebrate even our own dying, because we have learned from life that he who loses it will find it."

Death should be viewed as a natural life process. Yes, we all die – some sooner than others – but we all die. Life is associated with death. For Christians, the Resurrection gives us hope that there is more. There is comfort in knowing that we and our loved ones are not finished. Jesus tells us in John 14.2, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, if there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" We followers of Jesus are comforted in knowing that while we will die, we will also rise again. From death comes new life.

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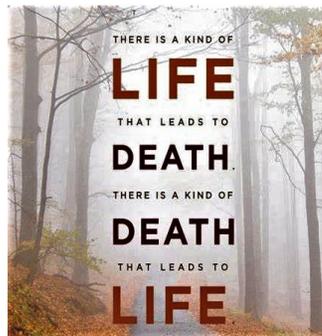
# Where O Death is Your Sting?

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Saint Paul brilliantly sums it up for us in 1Corinthians 15:57 as follows:

*Death is swallowed up in victory,  
Where O Death is your victory?  
Where O death is your sting?*

As a Christian/Catholic, I believe that my parents, fellow parishioners with whom I served on committees, members of my prayer groups, and my golf buddies live on in our heavenly homeland. This gives me comfort and strength in knowing that these deceased are in the presence of God and provides hope that I, too, will live in the same presence for eternity.



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## The Note Card

by Gabrielle Shufeldt

My husband had a poetic sense of life and mortality. He inscribed the following words on a note card knowing I would find it when I had to be looking in his wallet:

*May the day of your death not be a day  
of hopelessness, but of trust in the light  
that shines through earthly forms  
.....Milosy*



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Our quarterly publication of *The Lourdes Word* is an attempt for us, the followers of Christ, to publicly reflect on our faith journey. Each edition has a specific theme. Contained in this issue are reflections on “*Thoughts About Dying.*”



We invite the parishioners of Our Lady of Lourdes to submit writings which they feel will help address the theme of the next publication. All submissions will be reviewed by the publication committee. Please note that due to space requirements, editing may be necessary. Therefore, please limit your submission to 550 words or fewer. The theme for the next edition will be “*Why I Remain a Catholic.*” The edited copy will be returned to the author for review before final publication. Please feel free to submit writings through the parish secretary or to Mark Hudson, [markchudson@gmail.com](mailto:markchudson@gmail.com).

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