



Michael John Terry

April 26, 1953 - July 26, 2020

Faith is a hard thing sometimes. I guess that's why they call it faith right? To trust blindly. To walk in faith. To believe something you have almost zero proof of.

My father died last night.

Right now I am feeling the single most soul crushing pain I have ever endured. Even worse than losing my babies. My hands shake and tears flow as I search for the words.. and in faith ask the Holy Spirit to speak through me.. because this will not be a glowing eulogy of what an amazing selfless man my father was.

That would be a lie.

My father was the most selfless and selfish person I have ever known. He would give a stranger our family's last few dollars for groceries. I watched him do it as a small girl, when a man, with a wife and children who were the same age as Katie and I were digging in the dumpster behind our house, dad took the last of our money for the week and handed it to that man and said "Feed your family." He would give you the last bite of food off his plate. Hell, he'd give you the whole plate if you asked. No one, and I mean NO ONE was allowed to leave my parents home without at least a small bite to eat, typically accepted just to shut him up.

He also constantly thought he was being manipulated. It mattered not your age or who you were (wife, daughters) or what your request was. If you required his time or effort, it wasn't happening and the more you begged the more steadfast he would become in his bullheaded denial of your want.

That all being said. What I am writing here isn't about what my dad was or was not. It is about my lesson in Gods unyielding mercy for a man who frankly did not deserve it.. and a beautiful faith passed down by my mother to us girls. A faith that, for me has felt as barren as the Sahara for quite some time. A faith that has felt empty, lonely, and abandoning

specifically since March. But a faith that, even with my confusion and anger I have clung to, because as Peter said to Jesus when the crowds left him after they were scandalized by his message “unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life within you.” Jesus looked to Peter and said “Will you leave me too?” Peter responded “But Lord where shall I go? You have the words of eternal life.”

I am Peter. I believe, with all of me. Yet I continually deny Christ and what he can do, not only for me but for those I love.

My dad was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer last year. I shed no tears when I heard the news. Not a single one. This is the logical end to 40+ years of smoking. I loved my dad. But everyone dies and this was his own doing.

Far more terrifying for me, my sisters and mother, was the state of my dad's soul. I am a devout Catholic and I know that just because I love someone fiercely, that does not promise their entrance into Heaven. It's a nice thought, and it's comforting to think that all our loved ones are there with The Lord simply because we loved them and the alternative is far too hard to bear. Jesus died for all of us. He opened the gates of Heaven, He died so we may live again. His sacrifice lacked nothing. Nothing but our own participation. God is a gentleman and will force himself upon no man. We aren't supposed to judge, but that term is improperly used most, to aid poor theology and life choices. When it actually means two things

- 1) we are not to judge the state of a person's soul
- 2) we are not to judge where a person's soul goes after death.

The latter includes Heaven. We do not call the shots here.

The miracles of grace and mercy I have witnessed my father receive this last year has been beyond comprehension. He has been a bitter fallen away Catholic for many years. Spiteful and venomous toward the faith we hold so dear. Steeped in sins of sloth and selfishness he did not deserve a drop of mercy. He spat the word “Catholic” as if it burned his mouth.

And yet, we prayed for him anyway.

I knew if he died in the state his soul was in that he deserved hell. Whether or not our Lord send him there was not for me to decide, but hell is a real place. Souls fall into it like snowflakes in a blizzard. Christ himself said “many are called but few are chosen.” And

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” If I believe Jesus, then Hell is non negotiable, regardless of how much it makes me squirm. Dad was actively choosing hell.

And yet, we prayed for him anyway.

We prayed directly to Christ, God the Father and The Holy Spirit. We offered masses, rosaries and fasting. We begged the Blessed Mother and all the angels and saints for their prayers of intercession.

Why? Because we had faith. Faith that while God is just in his wrath, he is also endless in his mercy. All you need is a small crack for his light to shine in and fill a hardened soul completely. So our prayers were as stones thrown tirelessly at my fathers hardened heart.

Katie. My sweet, beautiful, strong Katie led the charge into battle for dads soul. I am the oldest, but in this true battle of eternal life and death she was our general. With a plan for war against the powers and principalities of this world she howled the battle cry and we charged ahead in suit.

A few months ago the crack in dad’s soul happened. Christ’s light shone brightly, dad finally relented and allowed a traditional priest to come visit him. I will be eternally thankful for Fr. Dwyer SSPX ministering to my father. He drove four hours round trip to hear my dad’s first confession in about 20 years, give him the Eucharist and last rights. After that wonderful Fr. Michael who is a local diocesan priest with a beautiful passion for tradition has continued in-home ministry of the sacraments.

I could write a novel about the miracles small and large I have witnessed my father receiving this past week. But this has already become quite the letter, so I will suffice to say that when Christ says “ask and it will be given unto you.” He means it.

That stubborn old mule gave us hell until the bitter end. Insisting on getting up alone and falling several times. Katie, Justin and I dropping everything and rushing over to moms house in pairs of two to help dad back to his chair or bed. He threw hospice out not once but TWICE!! And left all his care up to mom, Katie and I. At the time it was enraging, but looking back over yesterday I see just how beautiful his death was. No strangers in and out. No sterile hospital scenes. No beeping machines or corona visitor crack down.

A man who with all his faults was laying in bed surrounded by a legacy of love,

compassion and sacrifice. I sat with him, told him stories, held his hand, gave him medication, told him just how much I loved him. I soaked up every breath he took. I smelled him. I kissed him. I stroked his hair and his hand. I watched his eyes light up as grand babies came bopping in and out of his room. Their innocence bringing an air of peace that only a child's love can. I watched Max try to give him tums (medicine) to make him better. Lola played peek-a-boo. Chloe told him she loved him. His face would light up every time they came in.

Mom, Katie and I stood vigil in person while Julia prayed from home in Arkansas. My mother steadfast and faith filled was our rock.

Late last night Katie and I were sitting outside together having a beer. I was talking about how every single prayer of ours had been answered. EVERY SINGLE PRAYER. And how witnessing God's mercy work in real time was food for my starving soul. I likened it to a monsoon rain blowing into my spiritual desert and pouring grace upon my barren heart.

Around 11:30 I was with dad, when mom came and told me to get some rest. Katie was on the couch, I went to the recliner in the basement. Mom stayed by his side. Rosary in her hand and mass playing on her phone.

I went downstairs and tried to rest. I prayed for The Blessed Mother's intercession and dozed lightly. I heard a noise upstairs. It was a thunder storm. I could hear the thunder rolling and the wind and rain pounding. As I rested I remembered fondly how dad always opened the house during west Texas storms. He loved the rain. So do I.

The basement lights flipped on, jarring me awake. Katie in a panicked voice said "I think dad just died." I bolted upstairs and ran to him. I felt for a pulse while Kate grabbed her stethoscope. He was gone. His judgment was happening we howled grief and sang praise in a hauntingly beautiful chorus.

As we waited for the ambulance, I walked outside remembering the monsoon of faith I had felt. I walked out into the driving rain and let His MERCY pour on me. I cried hot passionate tears of grief and of joy at the same time.

I find peace in the hope that Dad was saved. But I ask all of you Catholic or not, to pray for the repose of his eternal soul. I won't shift gears and explain purgatory, and if you don't believe in "praying for the dead" remember that God exists in an eternal NOW so your prayers for my father today can be applied to him yesterday. God's mercy is endless, if we

accept it and I believe that dad did.

Daddy. I love you. And I KNOW that you loved me. You loved all of us. Life will never be the same, but I know that you are praying for us somewhere. I will pray for you every day until it is me in a bed surrounded by a continued legacy of love that you and mom started.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine.

Et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Fidelium animae, per misericordiam Dei, requiescant in pace. Amen.

Cemetery

Cemetery Park

Cedar Ave

Iron Mountain, MI, 49801

Events

AUG

Funeral Mass

09:00AM

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St. Michael

1782 Chapelle Rue, De Pere, WI, US, 54115