



A couple of times a year I go to Maria Regina Nursing Home in Brentwood to say a 12:00 p.m. Mass for some of the staff and residents. This home is on the large property of the Sisters of St. Joseph and many of the infirm sisters, along with other sisters, priests, and lay people, receive outstanding care there. I am a fill in for the regular chaplain. After saying Mass, I sometimes to the large cemetery where generation after generation of Sisters of St. Joseph are buried. The stones are all similar size and style and it calls to mind a place like Long Island National Cemetery or Calverton. These graves in Brentwood do no mark the graves of men who landed on Normandy or fought in the jungles of Vietnam. No, they are the remembrances of those women who stood in classrooms teaching hour after hour reading, writing, arithmetic, and most importantly faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene was sent by the Risen Jesus to go tell the apostles that He was Risen as he promised. These deceased souls at Brentwood continued through all the years of their lives to continue to teach Catholic school uniformed boys and girls, and classes of religious education children the same message: Jesus is Risen. I was blessed to have been taught by such loving women and from them I had my faith nourished.

A few weeks ago, I visited the cemetery and spent a few minutes at my sister Gerry's grave. She was buried there after her sudden death on February 19th, 1983. I told her how I was doing and how much I enjoyed my ministry at St. Martin's. The day I visited was quite like that sad day my family and I, along with many of the Sisters, gathered to bury my sister. Both were cold, raw rainy February days. Many of my family who were that day are also now home with God, including my Mom and Dad. As I stood at her grave, I could not help but think of how much Gerry had missed in our family: weddings, the births of grandchildren, baptisms, first communion, Jubilees and so on. So much life had passed since 1983.

In faith, I know she had not missed anything. Because of this day, Easter, which is the core message of our Christian faith, I know that Gerry was not in the grave where marked by the stone with her name on it. Her body was there, but she was not. That which made Gerry who she was, her joy, her energy, her love, her memories, her

friendships, her hopes and dreams were not buried. They were alive. The word soul, or spirit, is not easy to grasp. It is as elusive as the wind or a dancing flame of fire. But we believe, not only do we believe, we know in our hearts, in our bones, in our DNA that there is something in a human being that never dies.

Listen to how the great American playwright Thornton Wilder describes this reality: *We all know that something is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.*

St. Paul, who met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus wrote this about the spirit within us: *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38* Not even death can separate us from the love of God.

We sometimes ask, where is God? One of my favorite Mets of all time was Edgardo Alfonso, who played second base for many years and is now the manager of the Brooklyn Cyclones. Whenever Edgardo would get a base hit, he would point to the sky as a way of praising God for this talent. If I struck out, I don't recall him pointing down to nether regions but I will leave to the new Met theologian Tim Tebow. We often say, *I hope I get up there or somebody up there is watching over me.* I like such thoughts. But again, back to what I learned in the first grade from Sister Madeline Therese, God is everywhere. The Divinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not some faraway galaxy looking down at the earth with a Hubble telescope. In the Acts of the Apostles we read: *he is not far from any one of us.* ²⁸ *For in him we live and move and have our being.* Jesus has told us wherever two or three or gather in my name, I will be in your midst. We are told that wherever there is love, God is present.

So, God is with tonight in our Easter Vigil. He is with us in the darkness and the light. In the wonders of the word of God we have heard: All the heavens and earth were made by God. In the Power of the story of Exodus, where God's people break the bonds of slavery and are set free. He is here at we eat his body and drink his blood as we do this in memory of him. This is my body, this is my blood.

God is here. Our deceased, whom we remember at every Mass in our Eucharistic prayer are with God. And God is here. We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, our family and friends who have gone before us. They are not in the cemeteries where their bodies are buried not in the cremains that leaves us their ashes. They are here. They are alive. They are living you. Harry Smith is giving forth an Alleluia, Jim Biggin is reading the Gospel. Deacon Gene is at the baptismal font, Ronny Menrath is planting flowers in our garden, Chris Maggio is giving our communion. All of

them are. Jesus is Risen and so are our deceased. They are alive, *Neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

BURY MY BODY but don't bury my beliefs
BURY MY HEART but don't bury my love
BURY MY EYES but not my vision
BURY MY FEET but not the path of my life
BURY MY HANDS but don't bury my work
BURY MY SHOULDERS but not the concerns I carried
BURY MY VOICE but not my message
BURY MY MIND but don't bury my dreams
BURY ME but don't bury my life. I am with you; I am with Jesus

Alleluia: He is Risen!

May the Risen Jesus Fill Your Hearts with his Peace.

Happy Easter!

