

I grew up at 57th and Woodland, and when I was a child, my mother did almost all the grocery shopping at Milgram's on Prospect. I probably ran into Tony from the earliest years of my life. As a younger man he served the United States Army. At work, he advanced to a position of management. In social settings he enjoyed telling jokes, and he especially loved it when you paid attention to him. Who of us doesn't love that? Tony was a member of St. Anthony's, lived in his own home, took care of his own house, did the laundry, walked and took bus rides, and did his own shopping - practically up to the day he died. He was self-reliant and content with life. He never married or had children, but he had a large extended family and friends without number.

Tony also had faith, a faith that helps steady people in rocky times of trial. When someone we know finally dies, we ourselves directly face the mystery of life and death. Even if our own death feels far away, funeral rites manage to refocus our attention on what we truly hold valuable, and to reorder our thoughts on how we spend the hours of each day.

Saint Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians addressed the mystery of life and death head on. It had to. The Corinthian Christians were experiencing death within their own community. They believed that Jesus Christ would come again, but in the early years after his death and resurrection, while the followers of Christ were awaiting his second coming, some faithful Christians were dying. The Corinthians began to wonder how all of this would work out if some Christians were dead when Christ finally did return.

Saint Paul explained that both the dead and the living will meet Christ on that day. Those who have died will rise incorruptible, and those who are alive will be changed when the Lord Jesus comes. The dead will rise, and the living will possess immortality.

A funeral is a sober reminder of the power of death, even for someone as vibrant as Tony. But the resurrection of Jesus has taken away the power of death. St. Paul quotes what may be an early Christian hymn taunting death: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have victory over death because he is risen, and he promises new life beyond the grave to his faithful disciples.

For many years Tony held death at arm's length. People who saw him last week could not believe that was gone this week. He carried within him a joy about life and a seemingly immortal frame. Within his body he carried the good news about the mystery of creation, the joy of living, and the promise of immortality.

Today we thank God for Tony's life, and pray that this man who so enjoyed his earthly life will find even more joy in the presence of our redeemer, Jesus Christ, who is risen from the dead.