

Gonzalo Fabela

Gonzalo's family likes to say that he never met a stranger. If you weren't careful, you would find yourself in a lively conversation with Gonzalo Fabela, even if he never met you before and would never see you again. You became his friend in the moment. Gonzalo worked over 32 years for Kansas City Cold Storage, but even before that he was a simple laborer, working hard with his hands. He sometimes worked two jobs in order to make ends meet. He never got the benefit of a good formal education, but he did benefit from a large family, lots of siblings, children, and children's children. He lived here in the Northeast. He was devoted to his family. He fought for them and for himself. He loved for you to visit, and he especially loved for you to eat something while you did. When he was a kid, he didn't have everything other people did, not even both parents. He knew how people could suffer in body and in heart. He wanted you to know he was interested in you, and he cared for you.

Gonzalo was a man of prayer, and he believed in Jesus Christ. The two of them should get along fine because according to the gospel, Jesus never met a stranger either, and rather enjoyed food. In today's gospel, Jesus tells the crowd, "this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should not lose anything of what he gave me, but that I should raise it on the last day." He says, "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me." Jesus sounds like a man who just enjoys the company of other people. Gonzalo knew the feeling.

Gonzalo also liked birds. He had a house, but birds had houses at his house. They delighted and comforted him. Each of us needs something to delight and comfort us, especially when we are facing the peculiar challenges that life brings each one of us.

After Jesus died, his disciples faced challenges of their own. They believed his word that he would return after his resurrection. But it was taking longer than they'd thought. In fact, some Thessalonian believers were dying, and others began to wonder if the dead had lost their chance at resurrection. Saint Paul gave them assurance: "if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep." They'll all have a grand reunion in Christ, both those who had died and those who are alive. Then Paul uses an image that I think would have delighted Gonzalo, the lover of birds. Paul says, "we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with [the dead] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord." Paul imagines that all believers will live with Christ among the clouds in the air. Perhaps birds gave that kind of hope to Gonzalo. They knew a world beyond his, and they constantly beckoned him to raise his eyes up beyond the sorrows below.

My bothers and sisters, let us ask God to take our brother Gonzalo into the clouds to meet Christ, where they may talk like old friends. May we remain faithful to Christ, so that on the last day he will also raise us up.

Thursday, March 16, 2017