

## Sandy Oxley

Sandy lived with cancer for five years and donated her body to science so that other people could benefit from her life and from her death. Many people today are remembering her illness and her dying, but they are also remembering how little she complained and how much she loved. The entrance point into Sandy's character was not her cancer; it was her smile. She loved life, she loved Fred, she loved her kids and their families. Behind that smile was a person who understood you enough to give you stern advice when you needed it. Her value to the people in her family and among her friends cannot be overstated. Sandy may have lost her earthly life, but everyone else has lost a close member of the family, a friend and a mentor. Because she was a rock of such strength, it is hard to accept the fragility of human life. But we are as fragile as pottery.

In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul develops the image of earthen vessels. He speaks about having knowledge of the glory of God, but a knowledge that says more about God's greatness than our cleverness. And there are benefits. Paul writes, "we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us." It's easy to think about Sandy when Paul writes further, "We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body." Sandy accepted her illness, fought it appropriately and helped others walk this difficult path with her. Saint Paul says of his own afflictions, "we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." People like Sandy who suffer illness have a unique opportunity to help other people face their own sufferings.

In the Beatitudes, it's also easy to think of Sandy with statements such as these: "Blessed are the merciful.... Blessed are the clean of heart.... Blessed are the peacemakers." But we should also take comfort that we fit into the same Beatitudes as well: "Blessed are the poor in spirit.... Blessed are they who mourn.... Blessed are the meek." We come here meekly today, poor in spirit, mourning a dear lady, but taking hope that God has not forgotten us. Indeed, God promises us more than we can imagine.

The Book of Revelation offers tremendous hope to each of us when it says, "The former heaven and the former earth had passed away." And a voice calls out to declare this news about the faithful: "God himself will always be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, for the old order has passed away."

This is the good news about earthen vessels. They may look fragile, and they are. But their value cannot be destroyed. Today we gather to place our hopes in the God who made these promises, that the One who sent Christ among us as a suffering servant will bring eternal life to those who suffer from any physical or emotional infirmity. As Sandy lived faithful to her church, we pray for the grace to follow her footsteps. One day may we all be joined together in a place where there is no more death or mourning, and where God will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

**Thursday, April 4, 2019**