

The Turner family will have a very special celebration this Saint Patrick's Day. My mother will be 90 years old. We have no Irish blood in the family, so even though she was born on March 17, they named her Alice Catherine, not Patricia: Catherine for her grandmother and Alice for her mother's sewing instructor. Mom was born in the family home, not in the birthing center of a nearby hospital; and she first saw the light of day in the little town of Clements, Minnesota, not far from another town some of our ancestors helped found: a place called Sleepy Eye. For 55 of those 90 years Mom was blessed with a successful marriage until my dad died in 2002; they raised a large, healthy family committed to the values their parents handed on to them. My family feels truly blessed that we can still enjoy Mom's wit and wisdom after all these many years. We realize not everyone gets the blessing of parents you're proud of, and parents who live a long life, so we are most grateful to God.

At times it seems that God does not apportion blessings fairly. Some people who should live longer don't, and some who cause havoc in the world hang on. Of all the people in the bible, Moses deserved a reward for his long years of service to God. Last week we heard how God appeared to him in a burning bush and asked him to lead the people from slavery to freedom. Moses got them all free, but then they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Moses led the people through impossibly difficult days and kept the community together. Shortly before they entered the Promised Land, Moses went up Mount Nebo, where he saw with his own eyes, off in the distance, the destination that had taken 40 years to reach, but there on Mount Nebo, in view of his goal, before he took another step, most unfairly, Moses died. Not everyone gets the blessing they deserve. It was Joshua who brought the people into the Promised Land, and that is the story we hear in today's first reading.

For 40 years these people had celebrated Passover in the desert, and for 40 years they ate manna to get by. But now they were in their own land. They celebrated Passover for the first time on their own property, and instead of manna they ate their own produce. This reading is a symbol of the entire Christian life. We spend our years on a journey to the eternal land that Christ has promised us. At times it feels as though we are wandering. We eat the food provided for us at the eucharist from Sunday to Sunday, but we look forward to the day when we will no longer need this food and drink because we will be feasting with joy on the presence of God, at the banquet Christ has prepared for us.

During Lent we spend 40 days, not 40 years, focusing on the difficult journey of life. We abstain from some food and drinks. Some people give up things they really should do without, and when Easter comes, they hope to have strong new habits to choose what is right. Others give up things that they may return to when Easter comes, and the joy they will feel on that day is a foretaste of the promise of heaven. However we spend this Lent, it should fill us with hope that God has good things in store for those who follow where he leads, whether our life be short or long.