

Alvin Wood loved Cameron. He knew the businesses and the history. He went to our Catholic school and lived here almost all his life, and even if he stepped away for a while, his heart stayed behind. He helped the fire department for 38 years, and he took pride in the parish cemetery. He was a good husband, and a good father to his boys, who looked up to him for a model of how to raise a family, work a job, serve your country, and develop your faith. Alvin never drew attention to himself. He served in the Army in World War II, but you'd never hear him talk about fighting in Anzio or receiving 6 bronze stars. He managed the ag business for a while, but he'd only talk about driving a truck. He ran for city council once; on election day he did what other candidates did – hauled voters from home to the booth; and when he realized that he hauled more people than voted for him, he was probably the happiest man around. But he cared about others and helped people on the fringe of life in Cameron, whether they were transients needing a sandwich or locals who couldn't get service otherwise because of racial bias. He attended mass faithfully, even on vacation, and he served the early mass here for many years. He sure would not have wanted me up here telling everybody how wonderful he was, but he was, and everybody here knows it.

Maybe the best way to honor him is to remember some of the principles he stood for, principles you can find in the readings we heard today. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus gives very simple advice about how to live responsibly. You just have to look out for people who have less. Jesus felt so strongly about this that he makes concern for others the factor that determines where you go at the end of your life – to the right or to the left. St. Paul guides the Romans in the same direction when he reminds them you are never away from God – never. You may leave God aside for a while, but God is never leaving you. You may ignore what God asks of you, but God always expects us to do what we're told. To be specific, St. Paul says, "No one lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

Those who make bad choices are not completely lost, even when they die, and that is the message of the Second Book of Maccabees. The story concerns a ruler who lost many soldiers in battle. He took up a collection to remember those who put their lives on the line for their country. He expected the fallen to rise again, so he prayed for those who had died. Maybe the ruler knew these men very well; knew that they were good, but they had some faults; thought that after they died, he should pray that God would forgive them, and bring them eternal rest. He foreshadowed what we do whenever we pray for the dead.

My brothers and sisters, God has revealed to us how we should live and how we should die. Once in a while we get a good example of that from a man like Alvin Wood. So let us thank God for Alvin's life, and let us pray for the repose of his soul, but let us also renew our commitment to listen carefully to what God asks of us, that we may do it, because in life and in death we belong to the Lord.