

People loved Tom Corley. They just loved him. He wasn't just a nice guy or a pleasant guy, or a friendly guy. He was all those things, but lots of folks are. Somehow Tom made you love him.

You might say he lived an ordinary life. He grew up in Independence. He joined the army. He got married. Had some kids. Got a job. Got active at church. Had fun. Got sick. Lots of people do those things, and you might think Tom was just an ordinary guy. But he wasn't. He was a Purple Heart veteran from World War II. He worked as a mail carrier, and his clients piled his dining room table so high with Christmas gifts each year that the family could barely eat there. He joined the Catholic Church, and he helped other people do the same. He played softball with younger athletes when he was well into his 60s and 70s. He took his daughter Jean to a high school reunion, but his classmates thought she was just another pretty young thing who had fallen for Tom. As a father he was there for kids; as a husband he never left the side of his loving wife Joy; and he had fun. Tom went through a number of illnesses in the past few years, but he remained ever faithful to Joy, and a little bit stubborn about doing things his way. He knew what brought him happiness, and he pursued it with all his heart.

The family asked me to choose the scripture readings today, so I picked out three that I thought shed light on the past, the present and the future of Tom's life. The first reading is from the Second Book of Maccabees. It's about soldiers. Specifically, it's about the concern soldiers have for their buddies who died in battle. In this story, they take up a collection and send it to Jerusalem to make an offering because they believed that the fallen would rise again. These men had already put their lives at risk, so it was a small thing to give up their savings for their friends who had died. The second reading is from Paul's Letter to the Romans, where he talks about the significance of baptism. Anyone who helps people join a church knows the beauty and power of baptism. Saint Paul says we are baptized into the death of Christ, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. The third reading is from John's Gospel. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. In doing this, Jesus showed his power over everything – over sin and over death.

In the past, Tom Corley was a soldier. In the present, he is a Christian. And in the future, we believe that Jesus who had power to lift Lazarus from the grave will seat Tom among the angels and saints of heaven.

We come here today because somehow, like Tom, we too have been touched by faith. We believe in the importance of putting our lives on the line for others, because we believe in a God who rewards us. As we reflect on Tom's life, let us be grateful for his example, but let us also become stronger in our desire to enjoy the life we have received, and to live it in a way that serves others and pleases God.