

Tonight is the longest night of the year. After tonight the days start getting brighter. There will still be some cold dark days. Even though tomorrow is the first day of winter, it feels like we've had plenty of winter already. But light and warmth will come again.

Cory was a great kid. People loved him – adults, classmates, little kids. He was a bundle of energy – visiting friends, going to school, going to work, playing games, talking on the phone, playing football, playing softball, going home, going to someone else's home, then somewhere else. He graduated from Winnetonka, he went to Missouri Valley, he went to Avila, he tried Maple Woods. He thought about going back to Missouri Valley. He talked about going into sports radiography or maybe criminal justice, but he really loved being a cook; just not at home, at home he ate, but he'd cook at work. He never stopped. His phone rang all the time. He made friends everywhere he went. He made friends with his friends' friends. And one person after another, more than you can count, you'll hear people say, "He was my best friend." He crammed a lot of life into 19 years. He never seemed to get angry, even when he got into trouble – which happened. He could make you mad, but most of all he made you love him, and he loved you. And he was big.

How does somebody like that just stop being here? Only under the weirdest circumstances. That is one source of our sorrow. When friends are with friends good things should happen. But sometimes they don't. Sometimes when you're with friends, bad things happen. The very people you spend time with to become happy can also cause heartache and pain. None of us wants to hurt somebody we love, but we do it. Nobody wants to act irresponsibly, but we do. One of the most dangerous things we do is to go to a car. And there's probably not a person here who hasn't done it with too much on their mind, too much to drink, talking on a cell phone, or intending to speed. It's not surprising that accidents happen. It's surprising they don't happen more often.

Cory's death seems unfair. A loveable kid should have a long life. He should see the fruits of study and hard work. At least that's the way we look at life, and that's why we need something else, we need some other insight, some other wisdom to see us through. The first reading we heard today comes from a book of the bible called Wisdom. And whoever wrote it must have known somebody like Cory, somebody who died too young. The Book of Wisdom says you don't measure somebody's worth by the number of years they live. You measure it by how fair and honorable they are, and by how much they understand you. Listen again to these poetic words: "The just man, though he die early, shall be at rest. For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years." The Book of Wisdom says you may think white hair is like a crown you wear at the end of a long life, but the real crown is having understanding, and you have "old age" if you live clean – even if you're young. You don't need a lot of years to make your life worthwhile.

A lot of good can come from a short life. Good has already come. I mean, we had Cory. God didn't have to create him at all, but he did, and he gave him to us. More good can come from this if we learn a few lessons: how to have a good time, what to say to friends, when to say no, and how to live every day in a way we can proud of. Cory would probably want us to learn those lessons. He would probably not want us to stay angry; he'd want us to love one another. He paid a high price to teach us those lessons.

We gather in a church today because we have faith and we need hope. We have faith in God. Of all the friends we have, God is always the best, even if we don't always realize it. God is giving us another chance to treasure every person's life. We come today to receive the hope that God will welcome Cory to a better place, where there is no sorrow, but plenty of football.

Cory will never leave us. He will always be a part of our lives, all the way to the end of our days. We pray and hope for a day in the distant future, a day of light and warmth, a day beyond this winter, a day when God will gather us all together again to be with our best friends.