

When people speak about Doctor Schmidt, they never talk about his professional skill without also mentioning his personal charity. You could not untangle one from the other. There are professionals who get a job done but overlook the humanness of the patient, but others reverence the patient first; their skills serve a larger goal to bring comfort and healing.

The irony is that Richard Schmidt wanted to be known as a doctor. He did not draw attention to his charity, and he would not have wanted so many of us gathered here today to make such a fuss over him. But he was the same person at work and at leisure. He continually cared for people.

People do good for various reasons. Young children do good in order to avoid punishment. Lovers do good to court favor. Others do good because it's in their genes. They just have to. Sometimes their goodness goes unreported or underappreciated; sometimes people take advantage of it. But if goodness is in your genes you will never stop. No obstacle can keep you from doing what you must.

The greatest obstacle any human being faces is death. It stops our plans, dismantles our hope and ceases our skills. We avoid death, even we who believe in eternal life, because we feel blessed to be alive. We don't want to die. We want something else. We want a good doctor. Doctors affirm our belief that life is good and that it should be preserved; but they unwittingly uncover the scab of unbelief, the doubt about the next world that this world inflicts on our souls like a wound no hospital can dress.

The Book of Wisdom, in the passage we hear this afternoon, says that when we die we are in someone else's hands – not the hands of a physician, but the hands of God. The Book of Wisdom recognizes how much we cling to life and fear death. So it offers this comfort about those who have died: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. In the view of the foolish they seemed to be dead; their passing away was thought an affliction, and their going forth from us utter destruction." But that is not true. "They are in peace. They shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy." Death is fearsome, but we Christians gather here today to profess our belief that God has overcome death, and we have nothing to fear.

Patients bond strongly with their doctors. Patients trust their physicians with private information, from the nature of their illnesses to the looks of their naked bodies. A patient who loses a doctor is like a tightrope walker losing a balance bar. But in our loss we need only notice one thing: we stand already on a sure foundation, Jesus Christ and his resurrection.

At the end of his life, Richard Schmidt learned what it was like to be a patient. He also learned fully what it is to be a child of God. He was a doctor and a man of charity. His surgical skills could not rescue him from death, but his faith and love can. As so many people entrusted their lives

to Dr. Schmidt, we entrust him now to God, the bestower of all mercies and the healer of every ill.