

Whenever I visited John Pete O'Connell, he looked at me as if I meant the world to him. That made me feel very special – until I found out he looked at everybody that way. He made all of us feel we were friends from the moment we met. And we were. This man just naturally loved people. No matter who you were or what you did, Pete would want to talk with you and find out more.

He loved his country. He loved his church. He loved the Knights of Columbus. He loved St. Patrick's Day, and he has forever changed the calendar of events for the city of Cameron. His name is written on rock in McCorkle Park as a founder of our St. Patrick's Day parade. Pete loved to eat; he loved a good party, and through that parade he reached out to a whole community. He created memories for people he never knew.

Pete loved to farm, too. He loved animals of every kind – cattle, hogs, dogs. And he kept his row crops straight.

Pete loved a lot. But he loved nothing like he loved his family. Married 45 years, father to five wonderful children, grandfather to another 12 – Pete lived a happy life. His loving spirit overcame all the difficult days. He enjoyed the kids at home or at sporting events. He made his family proud.

And I'm sure he made God proud, too. It was hard to see such a strong, lively man spend his last days suffering. But we believe there is more. We believe God rewards the good. The second book of Maccabees says a splendid reward awaits those who go to rest in godliness. The Book of Revelation promises a new heaven and a new earth, where God will dwell with us and wipe every tear from our eyes, a place where there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain.

Jesus himself strengthened our hope when he raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus and Lazarus were friends. Jesus wept when Lazarus died. Lazarus had been good to him. So Jesus gave an incredible gift to his friend Lazarus. He raised him from death to life. John Pete O'Connell made a lot of friends, but his closest friend was Christ. As surely as Jesus raised Lazarus from death, so we believe he will reach out to touch the hand of this friend who meant so much to him, and that he will bring Pete to the eternal life for which he longed.

Pete may have died, but he will never be gone. He will live forever, encouraging us to follow his footsteps, to make a friend, to love a family and to believe in the gift of resurrection.