

The first time I met Leonard Baragary he told me he was sick. Quite honestly, I wouldn't have known it to look at him. Here was a man who had farmed all his life; who dreamed of raising a family; who bought good property at a good price; who kept his machines oiled; who liked to hunt; who loved horses, cattle, pigs and cows; who was proud of being Irish; who wanted nothing special in life; a man whose mother died when he was 18, who was the second oldest of ten children, who helped raise his siblings before marrying a few years later and raising his own family.

In the last few years, you couldn't talk with Leonard very much without realizing he was sick. His stroke made it difficult for him to carry on a conversation. But to look at him, you wouldn't know. Because to look at him, you'd see a man who worked hard, who loved his family, who believed in God, and who was happy. That set Leonard apart from everybody else. He thought he was a goner two years ago, but he got enough health back to bring delight to everyone's life. He knew he was dying, but it never depressed him. He was perfectly at home with nature, whether it was chopping wood or milking cows. He was well acquainted with death throughout his life, and he did not fear death when it came for him.

I suspect Leonard got that attitude from farming. But it was reinforced with a strong, strong faith. He knew there was a better world after this one, and when he died, it wasn't so much a departure as it was an arrival. He didn't concentrate on what he was leaving behind; he focused on where he was going.

Many people have complimented Vicky on the way she cared for this man, but she insists it was easy to do because he was so inspiring. The time she spent giving care to Leonard was time Leonard filled her with his spirit of goodness.

The scriptures we hear today fill us all with Leonard's spirit of goodness. Isaiah promises a day when the Lord of hosts will destroy the veil that veils all peoples; he will destroy death forever. In the Book of Revelation, John hears a voice that says, "Blessed are the *dead*. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." They have labored hard, but in death they can rest from their labors because their good deeds accompany them into the next life. Jesus explains this best with a metaphor right off the farm. If a grain of wheat is to produce fruit, it has to fall to the ground first. When it is buried it will grow.

Leonard firmly believed that the best fruit of his life would come to him after he died. But it will also come to us. As we remember Leonard's life, he will continue to make us better people. He will remind us the importance of living the way you believe, of being who you say you are. He will remind us that material things are not as important as family life. He will remind us that faith in Christ brings rewards beyond imagining, even if the doctor sits us down one day and tells us bad news about our health. If we live that way, the Lord God will wipe away our tears and diminish all our fears.