

Estella Dekaye

The loss of this beautiful 23-year old woman is causing us inconsolable grief, wide confusion, and untamed anger. Sadly, the person who could most make us smile, give us hope and calm our raw nerves is the one we have lost, Estella. She was friendly to everyone, full of joy. She was so kind that some people could take advantage of her, but most people took delight in her.

Estella overcame extraordinary difficulties in a brief life that brought her from the center of Africa to the center of the United States. Yes, I met her and her family because they were materially needy, but also because they were spiritually rich, seeking ways to become more involved at St. Anthony's. There I had the honor of baptizing Estella at an extraordinary Easter Vigil just a few months before moving to the cathedral. That night I immersed her three times in a pool of water that gave her rebirth into a new life with Christ. It is our firm belief that Christ will grasp by the hand those who were reborn in water and give them another birth at the end of their days. Darkness leads to light, and death leads to life.

This was the message of Isaiah the prophet to a people who suffered every reproach and sorrow. Facing utter desolation, they feared death above all. Isaiah describes death in metaphors: He calls it a "veil that veils all peoples," and a "web that is woven over all nations." In both cases, he uses an image of a covering that is diaphanous, something you can see through, as if through tears. The prophet promises hope to those who have fear: the Lord of hosts "will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces." Estella believed in this God. She read from the bible every day. She walked in the footsteps of Christ. She was a student of Christ.

In today's gospel we hear how Jesus taught his own disciples, showing them how to live. It gives us great comfort to think of how Estella lived out these beatitudes: She was poor in spirit, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, clean of heart and a peacemaker. Jesus knew that even disciples who possessed all these virtues would still face persecution and falsehoods. But he promised that their reward would be great in heaven.

Isaiah addressed a people who feared that death conquered everything, to assure them that God conquers death. Jesus, who died on a cross, rose from the dead and opened the way for us to find eternal peace with him after we are born from this world into the next.

Estella brought joy to people; she would never intend to bring anyone grief. She kept the word of God close to her heart. Let us keep that word close to ours. It is Christ who will guide us forward. He called those who mourn blessed and promised that they would be comforted. Today that feels like the biggest promise he ever made. It keeps our hope alive that Christ, who brought us from nothingness into existence, and from natural life into Christian life, can also bring us from this life into eternal life. Upon his cross we lay our tears, and upon his cross we place our hope.

Friday, October 8, 2021