

## Jeffrey Saragusa

Jeffrey faced large challenges in his short life. As a child he overcame Perthes disease with good care from parents, doctors, and clergy. He made lots of friends—even with people his other friends rejected. He loved his sister Kristin and then lost her in a car accident. He fathered a child while still a young man, but he poured his heart and soul into raising Alex in ways that only a single parent understands. Perhaps because of these challenges, Jeff always cared for those in need. He grew as an individual the more he socialized with other people. He especially enjoyed his friendships with pipe fitters, with whom he shared considerable skills, and his connections with family members, with whom he shared considerable love. The end of Jeff's life came too quickly to the surprise even of those who knew him well. At the hospital a priest performed last rites, and his beloved family and friends have come here today to console one another in the ways that faith alone affords.

Today's first reading resonates soundly with this brief life. The Book of Ecclesiastes, filled with wisdom from the ages, surveys the landscape of our daily experiences and summarizes life as a blend of plenty and poverty. There is a time for everything: to plant and to uproot, to build and to tear down, to laugh and to weep, to be born and to die. These short phrases express the vastness of human life, and they describe how we cannot control all that life hands us. We trust in God who regards the world he created, who cares about each one of us, and who supplies us with the grace to face the ups and downs that at times delight us and at times afflict us.

Faith supplies an anchor for these experiences. With good reason we hear today some of the words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. Gathered with his disciples on the night before he died, Jesus knew he had one last chance to form them before his brief life came to its end. His words extend through several chapters of John's gospel, but those we hear today surely consoled the disciples that night. They could not have fully understood them at the time, but as they recalled them later, they realized that Jesus had been preparing them; he anticipated the events coming to him and the road that awaited them. Like any good teacher or any good parent, Jesus could see what lay ahead, so he taught what people should learn. He said, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be."

People who have made a lasting impression on us never completely leave us even after they die. We recall the things they said, the actions they performed, the values they held, the places they inhabited—and all these come back to us at times when we can appreciate them the most. That will absolutely happen with Jeff. It happened most powerfully with Jesus, who, true to his word, appeared to his followers and still speaks to us through his sacraments.

As we mourn the death of Jeff, let us not lose heart in the promises of Christ. As his disciples, let us sit like students to learn his teachings. They will keep our journey steady whenever we face the challenges of life.

*Saturday, October 16, 2021*