

JoAnn, there's no way I or any one person can sum up for you how much we love Leslie. Her friends are without number and we will miss her. We thank you for Leslie. She has enriched our lives. She excelled in studies; she cared for people; she had personality, beauty, and warmth; and she shouldered her sickness with an indomitable spirit which came from faith in Christ.

Someone said to me, "Father, I hope you're going to explain all this to us." Of course, that's an impossible task, and yet there's part of it that's quite possible thanks to Leslie herself.

Leslie's death is a great human tragedy. It's a tragedy because we value long life and good health. Those are good values to have; the Bible itself holds them dear. But long life and good health are not the only values, nor are they the most important ones. The two greatest commandments are to love God and to love our neighbor--~~to develop our spiritual side and to establish good relationships.~~ You don't need good health to do what Jesus asked. You don't need a long life to be valued by Christ.

Did Leslie love her neighbor? Just look around this church. People didn't come here just to get out of school. We came because returning love to Leslie today is more important than education. Did Leslie love God? ~~I'm only one of many, many people who were touched by her faith.~~ She loved prayer, she loved the rosary, she loved the Eucharist. When I asked Leslie shall we pray, she said, "Yes,"--she didn't just nod, she said, "Yes," like a woman hungry for a meal, like a prophet speaking truth. It's uncommon ~~for me~~ to find spiritual depth like that in a woman Leslie's age. Maybe, maybe in an 80-year old woman, but rarely in those who are any younger. How did she get there? is what I want to know, because I'd like to get there, too. Leslie did not argue this illness with God. She had a deep sense that not even death would keep her from the Lord she loved.

"No one lives for oneself," St. Paul says, "and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."

Can I explain this one? Well, Leslie has made part of this easy to explain: What matters in life is love of God and love of neighbor. She achieved that. Leslie is an image of Jesus himself. Jesus spent his life as an ordinary man with extraordinary relationships. And he died a tragic death when he was young. This is the mystery of the cross; it's a tragedy, but through the tragedy there is hope, tremendous hope.

Leslie would be the first to have us keep our values in order: love, faith, truth, beauty, wisdom, and eternal life. These are the things that mattered to her, and these are the things that belong to her for ever.

Jesus loved the little children. We chose that Gospel for Leslie, but I think we need to hear it for ourselves. We are all children afraid of the dark, and crying for what we've lost. We need the embrace that Jesus alone can give--an embrace that assures us there is hope. Beyond death, there is hope.