

Virginia Bueno

Virginia loved things eternal. She loved God, of course, but she also loved family, the connections that stretch from one generation to the next and feel as though they, like God, will last forever. She loved her country and the friends that shared it with her. She treasured the value of education, and she and Raul passed that on to their children. Virginia loved religious art, which inspired eternal faith within herself and in those who saw it on her walls. Her love reached beyond her children into the lives of others, including strangers, especially people in need. All of Virginia's jobs were service-related: legal aid, teacher aid, legal assistant at City Hall, Guadalupe Centers, and a cleaning business. She wanted to make the world a better place, and she did it one person at a time.

Even as Virginia loved things eternal, she came face to face with the limitations of the human body. We think our bodies will last forever, but in the end they do not. Although Virginia experienced pains over the past year, her diagnosis with terminal cancer came out of the blue and caused a stunning change in how she viewed the world and how people viewed her. They realized all the more what a precious friend she was, the strength of her values, and the power of her love. Her memory will surely be as eternal as her loves.

Saint Paul wrote two letters to the Corinthians. His first is filled with confidence about topics like community, love and resurrection. But when he wrote Second Corinthians, he was dealing with personal matters that gave him pause. It's from that letter that we hear the verses the family chose for our second reading today. Paul writes, "our outer self is wasting away," but "we are not discouraged," because "our inner self is being renewed day by day." Paul endured many hardships and afflictions, verbal and physical abuse, imprisonments, shipwrecks and lashings. Yet he was able to write this: "this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal." Paul called the human body a tent. And he knew about that: Before his vision of the risen Christ, tent making was Paul's livelihood. Because of his travels he knew the rigor of carrying a tent on the journey, setting it up and taking it down to start again. God is eternal, but a tent is temporary. That's how Paul thought of the human body. It's a tent housing a soul, a transitory dwelling for the eternal human soul.

The promise of eternity comforts us at the loss of someone we love. Virginia inspired great love in the people closest to her. Her absence causes grief. But Saint Paul would have us think about something more than the loss of a human body, no matter how precious. The body is the tent that houses the soul. The soul lives forever. God prepares a sturdier dwelling for those he beckons to eternal life.

Virginia herself would encourage us to hold this hope for her and for ourselves. As we thank God for her life today, let us pray for the repose of her soul. May she, who opened her heart to those who had little, hear the great invitation to enter the kingdom of God. There may she discover and enjoy all that is truly eternal.

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