

Alfonso Estrada

Sonny started a second life after he retired. The first half of his life was what you might expect: He grew up in Northeast Kansas City and attended schools there, proud of his hispanic heritage. He made friends, formed opinions, and liked to talk. After high school he got a job with a community center and supervised kids completing community service. He got married. Had kids. Coached them in sports. Loved sports. Loved cars. He worked a long time with Bayer Crop Sciences. He retired.

Then he started a second life, when he fulfilled another vocation: He grew more and more into the role of being a granddad. He loved his grandkids, spent generous time with them, and spoiled them. Even after losing his wife of more than 50 years, when many people in his situation would spiral downward, he came to life again with those kids.

Coming to life again is the central belief of Christianity. We encounter this mystery originally through the cross of Jesus Christ. St. Luke provided a moving account of the last moments of Jesus' life near the end of his gospel. As Jesus prepared to commend his spirit into the hands of his Father, an act that would change the world forever for the good, even the earth reacted. An eclipse concealed the sun. Darkness covered the land. His final breath tore the temple veil tore in two.

Even in his death, Jesus was not alone. An upright citizen named Joseph had access to Pilate, used his influence, and arranged to take down the body of Jesus. He wrapped it in linen and lowered it into a tomb of rock. Even in death, Jesus had friends, and they prepared the place for him to rise again. Sonny experienced something similar when he ended the first half of his life. His family and friends wrapped him in love and offered him relationships in which he could rise again and flourish in his roles of grandfather and mentor.

St. Paul applied this death and resurrection theme to our baptism. Buried with Christ in those sacred waters, we rise as members of his body. All this takes place while we are alive. We put aside a first life, our former ways of sin, and we rejoice in newness of life, a second life of grace in Christ.

When we encounter the death of someone as important as Sonny, we take comfort in a scriptural passage like the one we heard from Wisdom: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them." We believe with St. Paul that death no longer has power over Christ, and that not just Sonny but any of us who have died with Christ shall also live with him.

As we thank God for Sonny's life, both the first and the second half of it, we experience grief at his passing, but let us also recommit ourselves to writing a second chapter of our lives, one in which we discover our true vocation, follow Christ, and develop the person we are into a true disciple. May the Good Shepherd lead Sonny and each of us to streams of life-giving water, where those who have died with Christ, by the grace of God, live for ever.