

All Saints Day

Last week, November 1st, the day the Church honors her members on earth and heaven, we buried my son Nick's second child Elizabeth in a small plot next to her brother Luke. She outlived him by two weeks. Surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses? (Heb. 12:1) Light penetrated our dismal gathering only by faith.

We had lived with her death for three weeks: numb, uncomprehending. Lamenting for Luke two years earlier was easier; this was more of a dull ache. It remains unfathomable. Two parents should not be admitted to the hospital twice to experience life's greatest miracle only to return home empty-handed. The dance became a dirge. Twice!

Yes Jesus smashed the head of sin and death. But evil still slithers and strikes. Such cruelty is senseless.

Annette and I longed to bear our kids' burden. That makes sense: we have more cross-bearing experience. Yet their suffering is uniquely theirs. That is our pain: to walk with them, helpless to change anything. We can only come alongside and pray and hope that the snakebite does not destroy something precious in them.

I cannot describe how proud we are of Nick and Meg. They were awesome parents to both Luke and Elizabeth. The decision after Luke's death to try again took guts. They gave it their all and endured with dignity the indignity of losing Elizabeth. Together. They share a quiet, profound reliance upon each other.

The All Saints Mass reminded me that the communion of saints is as earthy as the soil in which we interred Elizabeth. We may not have answers but we have each other. And we have help from heaven. Later that day I remembered my favorite saints fighting now for our endurance: Bruno, Francis, Faustina, John Paul II, Therese. I am grateful for their battles, their snakebites, the fires they endured for the joy set before them. They help us. I feel little but know that we are surrounded.

'The help we receive from heaven is like an invisible yet mighty river of life.'
Cardinal Schonborn