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Companions on the Journey

July10, 2022

Dear Friends,

Each family has certain months of the year that is a little more significant than other months. Perhaps there are a large number of birthdays or anniversaries. Or deaths. For me and my family that month is July. On July 14, my nephew Christopher died. On the 17th my Nana died; On the 18th my grandad died. On the 21st my dad died and on the 24th my mom. Not all in the same year of course but five deaths in the span of ten calendar days. That many deaths, of such significant people in my life and the life of my siblings and their children comes into our consciousness each year. As soon as the celebrations of the Fourth are over the mood changes pretty quickly. The focus becomes those who were with us in the flesh once upon a time= and who have all been called home to the Lord. I think of them often. Kiss their little reminder pictures each day as I open by Liturgy of the Hours Prayer Book. They are always gentle on my mind but in these days much more so. Often I visit the graves for all five share the same resting place.

I think of life in the kingdom where I believe they all are. Heaven is real. Our retired Holy Father Benedict XVI wrote a good deal about heaven and the kingdom of heaven. He said some fascinating things. Heaven is not so much a place as it is a person. Heaven is in being in a relationship of love with the person of Jesus and including all that that brings along with it. Jesus has invited us into himself. His very Spirit lives within us. We have been baptized into the Lord Jesus and a relationship established which will never end. We may love that relationship and the person of Jesus. We may hate that relationship and the person of Jesus. The former is heaven. The latter is hell. But notice that in each case the relationship abides. If we love it, that is by the grace of God and our embrace. If we hate it, that is our choice to reject the love and forgiveness offered so readily and lavishly to us.

You may ask yourselves, who would reject such an invitation? Well what if you believe you have no sin in you? What if you are decidedly not sorry for anything you have ever done? What if you are like the rich man in the story about the beggar Lazarus and just use people as pawns in your life? What if you do not believe you should have to ask for forgiveness and therefore never do? And you die in your sins. And you hate this being yoked to the humble and compassionate Jesus because you love the grandiose and the self-serving side of life?

My friends, what the Lord desires to give us—salvation—is real. But the Lord will never force it on anyone. It is offered and needs to be graciously received. Remember as Jesus hung upon the cross between two thieves (maybe they were the robbers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho). One orders Jesus to save himself and them too. The other asks for a simple remembrance from Jesus in the kingdom and is told that he will be with him that very day on paradise. Is that all it takes? Yes! Then why on earth would anyone refuse or resist. Yes. A very good question.

In the peace of Christ,

Msgr. McHenry