

Along the track

Being Remembered

There is a sign in a hospital foyer I visited recently which read:

Those who die in God's love go only as far as God . . . and God is very near.

What does it mean to die in God's love? To answer that, it's worth taking some time occasionally to read the obituaries which appear in the daily newspapers. The great and the unknown are included, the rich and famous, and those who lived their lives on what we might call a smaller canvas. To me, they remind us of the beauty and fragility of life. They are often sad, always heartfelt and those who have written them have done so with love and affection and the desire that this person's life be known and remembered. Universally the values of kindness, love, generosity, laughter and friendship are celebrated.

In these days, we can be very concerned with our own selves, our status, our wealth. They don't get a mention. Ideas like success, power and influence are not included in the best death notices or the obituaries. Humility, generosity, love and kindness are keenly remembered; wealth and social status rarely get a mention. I wonder is that what we mean 'to die in God's love'? Is it that God is very near to those who are generous and loving, open to others and humble in their outlook and the way they have lived their lives? Is that what it means to die in God's love. We used to define that in very narrow terms – being 'in sin' or not. Perhaps we need to look at that with different eyes so that we can understand what it means for us today.

Last year, Gail Kelly, the Chief Executive Officer of Westpac, retired. In her final message she spoke about having seen grown men and women of her age and more, in tears – they had lost sight of who they are, their spirituality, their inner person, she said.

Isn't that sad – these people in tears because of what they have lost along the way: a relationship, a partnership, they may not be connected to their children, maybe they've lost their health, maybe they've got no friends. They have no interests, they've lost sight of who they are, their spirituality, their inner person. They may be rich, powerful and even famous but...

She offered these further thoughts:

Generosity of spirit is an essential ingredient for being successful in your life, as well as your business; practicing generosity of spirit in the way you go about your life and indeed your leadership role in work. If you believe in practicing generosity of spirit, at heart you believe in the power of an individual to make a difference and at heart you treat individuals with deep respect and want to see others flourish.

The people who do not practice generosity of spirit are selfish. People who do not practice generosity of spirit are binary: black or white, right or wrong; they are quick to judge, intolerant, they shoot messengers, they take credit for work that others do (Gail Kelly Chief Executive Officer of Westpac).

In the pressure of the rat race, the rush to succeed and prosper, we can easily lose sight of the inner self. When we are defined as 'economic units' or 'fiscal problems' (the old, the young, the unemployed, the sick for example), when we are cogs in a wheel, when we are refugees away from our homeland and the very things that define us, when we are unemployed or underemployed in a society that defines success in terms of status and wealth, losing touch with the inner self is pretty easy to do.

But when we listen to eulogies or read the obituaries, we hear a very different message. So many of the things that are held to be important today just melt away when death comes; when we come together to celebrate a life, to remember, to mourn our loss.

When I read some of these obituaries, I can't help but think of the welcome he or she must receive when they come into the fullness of God's presence. I know that we tend to 'sanctify' those who have died, we overlook shortcoming and faults but I wonder whether God does too. I wonder whether it will be a case of hearing the Lord saying, "Well done good and faithful Mary or John or....."

Sometimes obituaries write of couples who have died hours, days or weeks apart. I read somewhere that there is no space for "died of a broken heart" on the death certificate. And yet, how else to explain their passing within hours or days of a couple married for 60 or 70 years? I have seen that – not just in the obituaries either!! Isn't it a pity that we don't acknowledge that! What a wonderful tribute to a person – not that he or she died of overwork or climbing the social or corporate ladder but simply missing the one they loved. What a tribute to them. Surely God is very near to them, in life and in death. After all, God IS love. That reminded me of the line underneath the inscription in the hospital quoted above reads: *To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.*

What do you want to be remembered for? Not later, in ten or twenty or thirty years time, but now! It is a sobering thought, isn't it!!!?

Regards
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