

# **God said: "I Am Love. I Am Forever."**

## **The Mission of Our Loved Ones Do Not End with Death**

It was a few days before my trip to Medjugorje back in 2011 that I was in St. John's Chapel in Kenmore, praying about whether I should go or stay home. You see, my mother was in the hospital in Rochester awaiting word of another operation because she had a serious septic infection that almost took her life. What do I do? As I prayed, I began to cry, asking the Heavenly Father for some kind of sign. In the moments that followed, I began to encounter peace within me and the assurance that mom would be okay. So, in spite of overwhelming circumstances to the contrary, I went to Medjugorje 4 days later, entrusting my mother to the love of God.

When I returned from my trip, my sisters told me that mom came close to death on the previous Tuesday. Our mother had been put on a breathing machine and things were critical—that night. Yet, she made it! However, mom told me something more profound—that she had indeed died!

Mom said that she saw her own funeral. Her coffin was nailed on top of a huge wooden cross. The cross was being carried down the street as young children dressed in pastel-colored clothing danced and sang around the cross. I was walking behind the cross dressed as a priest. She felt happy and at peace; however, a man told her that she had to go back. Mom said that she did not want to go back. The man insisted, telling her that she had to go back to complete her mission. Next, mom found herself back in the hospital room after the man hit her on the chest.

After she related the experience, mom asked me a question. What does the word mission mean? (My mother was a simple woman with a limited education). I responded to her question in the best way that I could. Then she asked me: "What is my mission?" I wasn't sure what to say. I told her that she needed to pray for her children and especially for me as a priest. A day later when I went to the hospital, mom said —out of the blue—that if I had not gone to Medjugorje

she probably would have died! Why did she say that? I had told no one about my prayer in St. John's Chapel. I was beginning to believe that my mother had indeed died and came back to us after experiencing her own funeral.

From 2011 until 2015, my mother had to go to a nursing home to recover from her surgery. Her health never improved; it only got worse. She had lost most of her independence because she had to be hoisted in and out of bed daily, and she needed constant bed care. She suffered from many other physical illnesses as well as spiritual and emotional afflictions. Looking back, I now understood what mom's mission would be—to carry a cross of sacrifice—a cross of obedient suffering imposed upon her by life's circumstances. Why? She was a mother who always carried the burdens of her children in her mother's heart.

God knew the depth of mom's heart, and her life-long desire to give all for her children especially after the separation from my dad in 1974. The focus of her whole life revolved around her family. She often worried over her children's troubled hearts. Yet her own weaknesses often got in the way of that pure love she had for her children. After all, she too suffered from the effects of the break-up of her marriage! It was her child-like faith that gave her strength.

My mother took up prayer again around the time I received my call to go study for the priesthood. The year 2000 was a pivotal year for her and for me. I went off to school while she began to encounter physical illnesses. The Our Father and the Hail Mary became her source of hope to get her through yet another day. Her prayers were more powerful than saying 50 rosaries. Why? They came from the innocence and simplicity of a humble, pure heart, seeking consolation and strength from God. By February of 2015, her cross had finally worn her out, and her mission on earth was to end.

On Thursday, Feb. 26, I received a call from my sister that mom had a heart attack, and she was not going to make it. I scrambled to clear my calendar and to leave Olean in order to drive 2 hours home to the Batavia hospital. As I was exiting the city, my cell

phone rang. I pulled over only to have my sister say that I needed to hurry mom was asking for me. My sister put her phone to mom's ear so I could tell her that I was on my way—all mom said—hurry, I need you, I need God, and I don't know how long I can last. I reassured her that I was on my way.

Not knowing if she would be able to hang on until I arrived, I called on Padre Pio and St. Faustina to go to my mother and to be with her. (Both of these saints said that they would not rest in heaven but would help us on earth). I asked Padre Pio to place one hand on her chest and the other one on her forehead and pray the rosary for her. I asked St. Faustina to pray the Chaplet of Mercy for her, envisioning her kneeling by my mother's bedside.

I did make it on time; and with my family, we kept vigil by her bed. My mother was no longer responsive. As I prayed Hail Mary's constantly, I asked Our Lady to come and hold her hand, leading her to the light of Her Son, Jesus.

Several hours before mom died, my family left the room to give me the opportunity to speak to her privately. She was still not responsive, but I spoke to her as if she could hear my every word (as doctors will tell you, those dying can hear until death). I reminded mom of her death experience years prior and her mission. I told her that her mission on earth was ending, and a new one was beginning.

I apologized for all the suffering that her children caused her especially me. I told her it was time to go to the Lord and start a more important mission of watching over us from the other side. I told her that I needed her help in order to fulfill the plan God had for me as a priest. Then I told her how happy God was that she had given birth to a priest for Him!

Mom died about 4:40 am on Saturday morning—Feb. 28<sup>th</sup>. At her funeral, I was praying for strength not to breakdown as I celebrated Mass. But something unusual happened. During the funeral, I began to beam with joy. Why? I felt closer to mom than when she was on earth. How can one grieve a loss when you sense their presence in

a powerful way? Mom was taking her mission seriously; her heart and her love were present with me!

At the bereavement brunch, my nephew came up to me and said that he had something to give me. (Years prior, my mom had given me her engagement ring and wedding ring. I was the oldest, but I did not get married. I told her that I would incorporate them in a chalice once I became a priest. It did not happen. So, the summer before her death, mom asked if I could give them to my nephew who was getting married. I said sure since they were her rings).

My nephew took me outside, started talking to me, then said: "Grandma wants me to give you something." He opened his hands, and I saw mom's wedding ring. He gave it back to me. I said: "Are you sure?" He said: "Grandma wants you to have it." (As if she spoke to him)!

The ring was a sign from my mother that she indeed was still with me. Her mission continues, watching over me and her whole family. I keep her ring on a statue in my room where I can see it. I have a prayer that I was inspired to write and say, honoring my mother:

*"Blessed is the woman who conceived, bore and gave birth to a priest for the Lord. Thank-you, mom, for giving me life!"*

Who we are on earth, we continue to be on the other side. Whether in Purgatory or in Heaven, my mother continues her mission caring for her children until we all meet again—forever, yes, forever!

**God is Love. God is Life. For those who have faith—love is life, and life is love lived! Our transition from this life is only a heartbeat of love away from embracing eternity! Speak to your loved ones who have gone to the Lord, they are waiting to hear from you!**

God Bless...Father David