

The Tablet

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EDITOR'S SPACE

Cathedral Club of Brooklyn Dinner **The Lord Says: 'Now Is the Time to Return to Me'** By Ed Wilkinson



As the family gathered last week around the hospital bed of my dying sister, we watched and waited and prayed for a miracle.

The chatter centered on time. It was just 10 years ago that she had been diagnosed with cancer. Feels like yesterday. The wedding, the births of the children, the anniversaries in between... Remember at mom's wake when... That was 25 years ago. Couldn't be! But it was. Where did the time go?

When did she get this cancer? How could it happen? Why her? Where did it begin? Questions with no answers.

She was only 57. Too young to die! She had hoped for another year, maybe two to enjoy her grandchildren. She asked why the latest wonder drug didn't seem to be working. She knew she needed a miracle and prayed for one.

Rosary and Novenas

The Rosary had been a faithful companion – more than I had ever realized. The well-worn pages of the novena booklet was proof of where she had put her faith and hope. The holy cards and prayer cards became sources of prayers to be recited at the bedside as we joined the crusade for a miracle.

Priest-friends arrived and said the prayers of the Church. The oil of the sick was administered. A pastoral care minister, who was a nun, beseeched the Lord for help. They became sources of consolation. Maybe my sister could hear them. Maybe not. It didn't really matter. We certainly could hear.

It seemed strange praying the Rosary in a Jewish hospital setting. Certainly, no one seemed to mind. Sickness and death become the great equalizers of religious differences. Just pray. Pray any way you know how.

The miracle wasn't meant to be. God decided that the time was now. He could no longer wait to bring my sister to her rest and so He called her, in spite of our petitions, in the early morning hours as her husband and a daughter kept a dimly-lit vigil.

More questions. Why didn't the prayers work? Time for the faith and trust that my sister had displayed time and again through her hours of her long ordeal.

Couldn't there have been just a little more time? A few more goodbyes? Give us just a little more time, Lord. Then, we'll all be ready.

Dust to Dust

This week we will hear again in the reading for Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, the admonition from the Apostle Paul not to stand around wringing our hands and worrying about time. Writing to the people in Corinth, he says, "Now the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation."

He reminds them that "We implore in Christ's name: be reconciled to God! Not whenever you are ready. But do it now! This Lent, make it happen!

The great consolation we have as Christians is that the Lord is gracious and merciful, "slow to anger, rich in kindness, and relenting in punishment." The reminder comes from the Prophet Joel and is part of the First Reading for the Ash Wednesday liturgy.

The Church reminds us in her liturgy that we are not the masters of time but God, the Creator, set this world in motion and He will come when He wants to come. The challenge is to stand guard and be ready.

Death never seems to come at an appropriate time. It's always inconvenient, disturbing, and anguishing. Who would choose to spend St. Valentine's Day in a funeral parlor? And what about the snowstorm that's on its way?

Appropriate Time

Coming as we begin our observance of Lent, my sister's death serves as an

appropriate reminder that we know not when and where it will come. While my sister didn't want to depart, we felt that she was ready when she was called. She had been faithful and trusting and loving, and therefore, she was prepared when her Maker said it was time to return.

Perhaps, her final gift to us was the timeliness of her going away. Along with the memories of family gatherings, childhood mischief, and responsible adult deeds, there will be the immediate images of her death at a time when we most need to be focused on the futile finish to life.

If we fail to heed the message, we do so at our peril. If her passing serves as a reminder, then it is just one more contribution she made to all our lives.

*When writing letters to the editor, please send them to ewilkinson@thetablet.org.
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Items for the youth page should go to megiossi@thetablet.org.*

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