

Our Mom: She Showed Us How to Stand

This past Sunday at St. Jude, a gentleman of our parish came up to me in-between Masses. He's there every Sunday and supportive in so many ways. He shook my hand, shook his head, and it seemed as if he was fighting back tears, and said to me, "Father, you only get one mother. And I think about mine all the time. You do the same."

If there is one thing that my family would want me to say here today, along with the fact that we had the best mother anyone could ever have, it would be just that. If you are blessed to have your mother, your mother and/or your father with you, love them. Tell them. Show them. And, if there happens to be "some kind of thing" between you and them, and you have the ability to heal it, then take that step.

I told my brother and sisters the other night that I did not want to talk long today. Together in unison, they all said, ***"I'll believe that when I see it!"***

On behalf of my entire family, it is my hope to share with you in these few moments how grateful we are to all of you. More importantly, it is my hope to share with you how our Mom lived her faith every single day. From the day that she and my Dad were married and began to build a family together, she picked up her cross—and she never put it down. Ever. And she carried it joyfully.

First, as the oldest of 7 children, I want to thank my siblings, my brothers in law and sister in law and all of their children for the ways in which you cared for Mom, especially during recent years. There were moments when it was not easy. But I know you wouldn't have it any other way.

To our Mom's caregivers: Charlett, Pat, Dr. Gaspard, and the amazing people of New Century Hospice. We learned so much from you, our hospice caregivers. Everyone knows our Mom loved football. Well, if you want to draw from that image for a moment, we all went down the field together, and you all helped us get it into the end-zone, with dignity with peace, with victory.

Lastly, in terms of thank-you's, thank you to the people of Our Lady of Mercy Parish, where we all grew up and—right over there—attended school. The things that Mom loved the most in life were family, cooking, football, and, of course, music. She stood right over there every single Sunday and on holidays to sing with the Our Lady of Mercy choir. She practiced right across the street every single Wednesday night. This was her true holy day. We are very grateful to Beth and Dana, to Louis and Brian for singing and playing today. However, and this is a HUGE however. Steve Galiano, our Mom loved you so much. For you to be able to be here today means more than you could ever know. And I'll tell you just how much my Mom loved you. Not that many years ago, when she was living with Talissa and Jason, the 2 of us would always cook dinner together on a Friday evening. One week, while we were sitting there drinking a glass of wine before we ate, we got on the topic of, believe it or not, her funeral. Now granted, we were being totally humorous about it. But at one point, when I said to her, "oh, don't worry Mama. I'll come up with something good to say about you. Yeah, I guess I'll be the one to do your funeral," she responded with, "oh, that doesn't matter—as long as Steve's there!" So, no doubt, you definitely rate.

If you want to see the real picture of who our Mom really was, then you have to go back to that time before she began to experience issues of health and infirmity. She was, from as far back as any of us can remember, an amazing woman. All last week, some of our cousins kept repeating themselves, "...and that smile. I'll never forget her smile."

This has been expressed also by those whom they knew for many years. Mom and Dad represent an era that many would say is gone. They built our community and our church. One of the first messages I received after Mom had died was from Fr. Paul Counce. His parents, Harold and Lettie, have also passed from us. The 4 of them were best friends. It always made me happy to see them together. Then there are others, like Tommy and Rita Wallace of St. Jude, who cannot be with us here today. Again, best friends all through life. Tommy and my Dad grew up from elementary school on. High school together. Stood in each other's weddings. And Tommy was one of the guys who carried my Dad on the day of his burial. But the other day, I spoke with Rita on the phone. Now, Rita is from Texas, ya'll. And when you speak with her, you know it. And she said to me, "oh, Trey, your Mama was such a nice ole gal. She was what we back then called classy. She always made me laugh, no matter what was going on."

Within the context of daily, Christian faith, I've always told people that our Mom was both the funniest person and the strongest person I've ever known. Her example can be described in more than one way, but I will offer one. Many years ago, while on our priests' retreat, we had painted for us a reminder of that scene of Mary at the foot of the cross. We were reminded by our presenter, that, for a Hebrew woman, standing was a sign of courage. Well, if our Mom taught us anything, she taught us how to stand.

SHE TAUGHT US HOW TO STAND AS FAMILY, IN WELCOME OF EACH OTHER, AND ANYONE YOU BROUGHT INTO THE HOME WITH YOU: Because of this, we chose this Gospel reading today, because, while Mom was very much Martha, she showed us how to "live as *Mary* in a Martha world." Holidays. Recipes. Traditions. The setting of the table. Birthdays. Anniversaries. Valentines Day. Friday afternoon coffee. You name it. She was very much Martha, busy with many things. And, to be completely honest, I fought with that sometimes.

When she could no longer drive due to her eyesight, for example, she would call me on Friday mornings and tell me that she needed me to take her to a couple of places, one of which was the ATM. If there was a birthday coming up—and it didn't matter whether it was one of the grandchildren or one of us adults—she was going to have a card with cash. We were driving one day, and I told her, “you know, Mom, there comes a point when you can stop doing this. No one expects it of you. After all, you're in a budget, you know.” To which she said, “shut up and drive the damn car!”

SHE TAUGHT US HOW TO STAND IN PRAYER: There was nothing coming between her and her Martha side. But she always remained faithful to the Mary side. The prayer before meals. Her patient adapting to the times and changes in culture. And her personal prayer life. ***While she was Martha during the daylight hours, she was very much Mary 24-7.*** This was first impressed upon me when I was very young, like sixth grade. This was back in the day—as some may recall—when Catholic High had Monday night bingo and our Dad was a caller. He called bingo every Monday. One week, when he was out, Mom was standing at their bed folding clothes and watching Monday night football at the same time. That was the first time I had ever noticed her rosary hanging on the bedpost of her bed. I innocently asked, “why do you keep it there?” She said, “because I pray it for all of you every night after you have gone to bed.”

OUR MOM TAUGHT US HOW TO STAND IN COURAGE BEFORE WHATEVER MAY COME YOUR WAY IN LIFE: raising, feeding, clothing, educating 7 children; making ends meet; cooking supper every single day of the week; then bankruptcy, the sudden death of our Dad, my cancer, and a whole lot more—showing us, that, if you stand together, you can stand through most things. When I entered seminary, I had been there not even 2 months and already wanted to pack up and go home. I mean, I was just convinced that this was the biggest mistake of

my life. We talked on the phone, and she showed me the need to stand strong through the moment. She told me, "I'm not telling you not to quit. I'm just telling you don't make that decision right now." And the next day, and the day after, it was easier and easier.

People can also show us how to stand by keeping a lighthearted approach to life. The first time I really remember witnessing the merging of my Mom's courage and sense of humor was in middle school. It turns out, that, for several days in a row, when Dad was at work and we were all at school, she was receiving prank phone calls from some guy. Now, this is going to sound foreign to some here but not to all of us. This was back in the day when there was one phone, and it was a rotary dial phone on the wall in the kitchen. And there was no such thing as caller I.D. So, anyway, every day apparently this guy would call and say, "I'm watching you." Everyday. And she didn't know what to do. This day, however, we were walking in the back door, and she was on the phone, and from our side of the conversation, what you heard was, "well, I hope you like what you see!" **(PAUSE)** So, obviously, the conversation that day was, "I'm watching you!" She took a deep breath, smirked, and said, "well, I hope you like what you see!" And hung up the phone. And don't you know, that guy never called back again! I remember thinking how cool that was and saying to myself, "yeah, I wanna be like that!"

MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, OUR MOM TAUGHT US TO STAY STRONG AND STAND THROUGH ANY STORM UNTIL YOU COME TO THE

RESURRECTION SIDE OF IT: They, we, went through a lot together.

The loss of a grandchild. Bankruptcy. The sudden death of her nephew. The loss, ultimately, of all of her siblings. But she knew that there was a resurrection side to anything. The day that our Dad died, I went home with her and stayed with her that night. When we had gone to our 2 rooms, I could hear her in her room crying. I felt so helpless. All of her life, my Mom had been one to walk around the house singing, mainly

songs from church. But the weeks and months of our father's health issues had really worn her down. She was no longer singing. The next morning, however, when I woke up, she was in the kitchen making coffee, and, believe it or not, she was singing—again. It was in that moment that I knew, that, not only was she going to be okay, but that we would be okay too. We'd be okay then—and whenever we stood before any cross in our lives.

[CONCLUSION]:

Perhaps some of the best advice our Mom ever gave us, she actually gave us 25 years ago. Part of it is printed in your program today. In 1995, the LSU Tigers were having a rough patch. Mom was aggravated that many fans simply weren't standing during kickoffs. So, she wrote a letter to the editor of, what was then called, the State Times/Morning Advocate. I do not think it's coincidence that we were actually able to recover that letter just yesterday. In fact, her words may be very appropriate for all of us today, given the condition of the world, and the stress, pressure, and busy-ness that everyone is experiencing. Her letter was not just about standing for a kickoff. It wasn't really about that at all. She paints this picture of listening to the crowds from her front porch of her Government Street home when she was young, and wondering what it would be like to ultimately one day be there, in Tiger Stadium on a Saturday night. She talks about the energy. The excitement. The community spirit. She describes the grass of the field as being the greenest grass in the City. This was her take on the privilege of simply being us—city, community, family—being here, together. And that nothing should ever keep us from standing— together.

These last weeks, Mom could barely stand at all. This was hard to watch. She needed others to help her. That last night, Tim, Sheila, Charlett, and our sisters were able to stand there and pray out-loud with Mom and for Mom. I know that they will hold it a blessing forever, that, as she had stood with us throughout all of our lives, they could stand with her in the very end. Maybe that's what she has left us, then. ***None of us should ever feel that we have to stand alone.***

We love you, Mom.

Thank you for carrying us—into this world.

Thank you for holding us—in our early days of this world.

Thank you for showing us how to take our first steps—and everyone after that.

Thank you for showing us how to stand strong—until the end.

We will remember you every time we're at this table and the table at home, until we are with you forever at the eternal banquet.