

John 5:24

From Love to Glory

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Living God+: let us pray.

Holy God, creator of the universe, knower of all mysteries, lover of our souls: pour out your Holy Spirit on us; anoint us with your healing hand; grant us your peace; and remind us of your Presence in all things. Receive our love and our trust, even as we suffer our loss; fill us with the sure knowledge that those we love but see no longer are home again with you, and in time return us to the deep joy of knowing that, in your care, all shall be ultimately well. In the strong Name of Jesus Christ, we pray.+ *Amen.*

This is a hard, hard day that we all hoped would never come. For over four years, this family and this parish, this community and this city have all hoped and prayed that this day might not come to pass, but here we are, gathered in love and grief for the passing of Keith Lee Segovia, a shining light in the world, and a truly extraordinary young man.

We gather to support each other, and to grieve; to offer our love and our respect, for this beautiful young man who had such an impact on so many people. Look around you at this church: there are people here of every age, from every sector of the community, who were changed by the life of Keith Segovia. Few of us can ever hope to make a difference to this many people the way that Keith has. His joy and passion for his family and his community, for the sport of soccer and his teams which he loved so dearly; his commitment to his elders and to his youngers is so evident. Keith was a young man of extraordinary love and strength: knowing that his days were few, his only concern was for his family, that they might be OK without him. It was only after the loving reassurance of his mother, Aggie, that they would be all right, and that it was OK for him to let go, that he took his last breath on earth, and gave himself back over to God.

What can we say about a beautiful life, ended so soon? Where is our loving God in this? Didn't our prayers help? These are the questions most on our minds, I think. Like so many of us who have lost someone dear at a young age, I've spent years wrestling with these questions. Perhaps like you, I've gone from anger at a seemingly silent God, all the way full circle to a glimpse of the overarching and extraordinary love of a merciful God, and I stand here to say, like our apostle Paul said in his letter to the Romans, that I am convinced that "... *neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38-39)

I am convinced that not only can nothing, NOTHING, separate us - separate Keith, or Aggie, or Guido, or Jason, Jennifer, or Sean, or any of us, from the love of God, and from the saving grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; but I am convinced as well that, although our hearts break with the loss of Keith, there is a mending of creation in a sense with the return of Keith from life on earth back to eternal life with God. Truly for the grieving, there is no more color, no more melody, no more joy to

be found in these heavy days. But in heaven, there is joy and a great welcome home for Keith - into light, and beauty, and wholeness! Healed and whole again: isn't this what we've ultimately been praying for? Keith's freedom from pain and limitation: a child of God, returned to God, set free into larger life: Thy Kingdom, come.

Some would say it's a hard truth that our time here on earth is finite. We are created beings, as natural as the birds or the trees, but born with a special assignment: to learn how to love. We have a beginning; a rising, and a middle; a decline, and a death, and there is nothing broken in this. But although these circles of living and dying are natural, still it is a terrible and painful thing to see this circle go around too fast. I was struck last night at the funeral home by Keith's photo montage, where I watched this bright-eyed baby grow into a spirited boy and a beautiful, vibrant young man with clearly a stellar future ahead of him, and then – The End. No more photos: no more soccer triumphs; no more graduations, or celebrations; no wedding; no babies. We are shaken by the loss of Keith so young; there is absolutely *nothing* OK about this. But we can take sure consolation in knowing that he more than completed his assignment of learning how to love: look around you and see how extraordinary the reach of his love was. If you were present last night at the funeral home, you would have seen the long lines of hundreds and hundreds of people, waiting for hours outside in the cold, to pay their respects to this young man whose love brought so many people together. And we can take sure consolation in knowing that God will create a world of blessings out of this grievous loss. All the people lucky enough to be loved by Keith – people of every age, color, religion and persuasion - will find their lives different by having known him. How wonderful is this!!!

And how wonderful it is for *us* to know that, when each of our mortal times is completed - whether we go around the circle fast or slow - we, like Keith, are returned to God, purified and made worthy by the grace of Jesus Christ, to enter into larger life. Thanks be to God that our days on earth are *not* infinite – mortality is really hard! - and thanks be to God that, for however long we do move through our own circles of life, we never move through them alone. Being finite and mortal, our troubles are a given, but Our Lord Jesus is present with us through it all, just as he was present all the way through every moment with Keith.

Seeing this beautiful church filled to the brim as we gather in our grief, I'm reminded of how much solace and comfort we find in our traditions. We gather together in our various religions and customs, all in the name of the One, Holy and Living God, united in our offering of love and support. Our Christian funeral traditions are shaped around the resurrection: it is Easter we celebrate today, even in the midst of the tomb. We vest in the white of the Resurrection, and carry the Paschal Candle from the Great Vigil of Easter Eve to remind us of the return of the Light of Christ, resurrected from the grave to gather all of us out of death, and into eternal life with him. Our rituals and traditions reassure us all of this larger life: in the midst of the press and chaos of times like these, we are reassured that there is still color, and melody, and beauty, and hope. Being reminded of this larger life, we are reminded of God's peace, and of God's great grace. In the midst of the weight of this dark day, even in the presence of life changed irrevocably for this family and

this community, let us remember that God in Christ is with us, that he hears our prayers, knows the larger plan for us, and loves us far beyond our human understanding. Through this greatest love of all, we are purified and made worthy to enter the kingdom of God, where we can lift our heavy hearts in gratitude that Keith Lee Segovia, once one of St. John's finest and most regal acolytes, now enters God's Kingdom to join the saints and angels in that heavenly chorus, singing Glory, Glory, Glory!

Thanks be to God. Alleluia! Amen.

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