

Lessons from Sarah

Life is short. I was reminded of this simple truth this past week after the wife and unborn baby of a college friend passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. Our society tries to hide death, old-age and sickness, but, eventually, we will all be called. Hopefully, we will be ready. The story of Sarah and Cecilia Harkins is tragic and painful, but it offers a powerful message. We need to live our lives with the purpose of being ready to meet God at any time.

Sarah Harkins was in her backyard, when she disturbed a wasp's nest and was stung. She had an allergic reaction to the sting, and struggled to make it back to her house. While her husband, Eric, called 911, she fell unconscious, never to awake again. Medics were able to revive her, and she was put on life support. Doctors later discovered that the shock triggered an aneurysm in her brain to burst, and at that point, there was little hope for a recovery. The unborn baby, Cecilia passed first, and then, the family made the difficult decision to take Sarah off life support.

Sarah left behind her husband and four surviving children: Liam (7), Analee (5), Jude (3) and Mary Faustina (1), who was born with Down Syndrome.

As news spread of her story, one of the recurring themes was that people could not stop thinking about her. Complete strangers, who found out about her through friends, Facebook, or various news stories, were drawn to her. Many confessed that they could not stop crying, even though they did not know her.

When I heard that she was in the hospital and the situation was bad, I texted my family asking for prayers. One of my sisters, who had never met her before, felt an instant connection. She Googled her name and came across her blog. She later emailed me, "Wow, she seems like a special person. Been thinking there is something that God wants us to notice when a young pregnant mother dies even though people are praying for a miracle. We have to pay attention because there HAS to be a reason." When I followed up with a phone call, she revealed that Sarah had been on her mind the past few days, and she was amazed how much Sarah inspired her by reading just a few of her blog posts.

My sister is hardly alone. The world, yes the world, has been moved by Sarah. There are over a 1,000 new articles on her, with major papers like the Daily Mail and NY Daily Post picking up the story. On fundraising sites to help Eric and children, almost 3,000 people have contributed over a combined \$200,000, and contributions have come from France, Germany, Japan and many other places. Moreover, the reporting, even in the secular press, has emphasized the profound faith of Sarah.

We are left to wonder: why did God not heal Sarah? Perhaps, God did not perform a miracle because she did not need a miracle. That is, she was on her way to eternal

glory. The wasp's sting was not part of God's plan, but I believe God can take good even from the most horrible of events. In Sarah's case, God maybe wanted to teach us something through this special person.

Sarah was best known for her profound devotion to the rosary. She started making rosaries when she was 15, and eventually, she started a business selling her handcrafted clay rosaries. She said this about her business: "I have come to grow in my faith and my devotion to Mary through rosary making and the people that I've encountered because of my work. I believe this is what God wants me to do and I hope that I am spreading the Gospel through my work." According to one article, she would get up early with her daughter Faustina praying the rosary with her, and then pray it again with the other children and husband later in the day.

Quite fittingly, her last blog post was about making a bead to symbolize hope. She wrote, "I love the symbol of the anchor for hope. It is very powerful. Hope is the virtue of having confidence in God's mercy that we will be in heaven with Him someday. When we have that hope, nothing in life can move us. We are anchored in God. Now that is something I need to pray for every day and I hope you are inspired and reminded by this bead to pray, too." This inspiring and beautiful quote has appeared in the television coverage, newspapers, and numerous blogs. Now, even a jewelry company has created the Sarah Harkins Memory Anchor based on the quote as a way to raise money for the family and spread the message of her blog post.



A photo of anchor beads from theclayrosarygirl.blogspot.com.

There are many other aspects of life which can inspire us. She was an active parishioner at St. Mary Catholic Church in Fredericksburg, starting a women's Bible study for the parish homeschool mothers. She home schooled her own children, and created a Montessori-style preschool program for the local home schooling co-op. She volunteered at Mary's Shelter crisis pregnancy center, and they recently announced that their next home to open in August will be called the "The Sarah and Cecilia Harkins Home." And, the list goes on.

What is the lesson of Sarah's life? We have to realize that life is short. We are a wasp sting, a car accident, a heart attack away from leaving this world. What are we doing? Are we preparing to meet God? Are we in good standing with our spouse and children? What would be our legacy?

We could start by emulating Sarah's virtue of hope that we will live with God for all eternity, her devotion to a strong prayer life, especially the rosary, and dedication to family life, education, and the church.

Please pray for the soul of Sarah and Cecilia, pray for strength and comfort for Eric, the children, extended family and friends, and pray that her life will inspire many to better love and serve God.

(If you want to donate, please go to gofundme.com or youcaring.com.)