

# Pray for the dead

We all live different lives, and, not surprisingly, we all die different deaths. A day or two before Archbishop Borders died, a former cook here at the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen rectory, Donna Gerkin, died. The contrast between the two was striking.

Archbishop Borders, a humble man, was known by thousands. Donna, a humble woman, was known by only a few. Archbishop Borders lived 96 years. Donna lived 60. The Archbishop, in his last days, had a steady stream of visitors. Donna isolated herself. Archbishop Borders was honored with a magnificent funeral at the cathedral, attended by at least 1,000 people. Donna didn't want any kind of Memorial Service. Archbishop Borders was interred in the crypt in the cathedral. Donna, at her request, was cremated, and wanted her ashes to be buried next to her sister.

Archbishop Borders was universally saluted for his humility. When my mother was dying in 1983, my sister entered her hospital room one evening, and saw the room in darkness with a man seated in the shadows. It was Archbishop Borders. My mother was asleep at the time, and he didn't want to awaken her. My sister never forgot that scene.

When I spoke to my mother about it later, she commented how "in the old days" when a bishop would visit anyone, everyone would be running around making sure everything was perfect. Archbishop Borders sought no such attention. He carried the heart of a parish priest to the grave.

Donna was humble in her own way of serving. She always worried that I didn't have enough to eat since I'm rarely in for supper. She would often leave a plate for me. In the Gospel, Jesus said: "I was hungry and you fed me." What we do to the least person we do to God. In the eyes of "the world," Donna may have been among the least. In the eyes of God, I think Donna was among the stars.

Shakespeare noted that we are all actors on a stage. How true! We all have different roles, different titles, different attire, different levels of prominence and so on. In his sermons and talks, Archbishop Borders often referred to "history and mystery." Our

personal histories are indeed different. And in the grand sweep of time history forgets most of us. Only a handful are remembered much beyond their own generation. In the grand sweep of eternity, the longest life is so short, and the shortest life is of such value because of God's eternal love.

And that is where the mystery comes in. As Christians, we believe that our mortal bodies are indeed "dust to dust." We are the dust that God breathes his spirit into, and one day our bodies will return to that dust.

But we believe in something more. We believe in resurrection. We believe that God one day will find our dust, and make our mortal bodies like Christ's own body in glory.

Before that moment, however, our spirits do indeed go to God. And in that moment of entering the presence of God, these two people with such contrasting lives and deaths, had very similar experiences. I believe that both entered a light so powerful that it was beyond any light on earth. I believe both experienced love and joy so profound that human language could never express it. I think they both heard a voice: "Well done good and faithful servant."

We pray for the dead on the chance that something may be keeping them from fully experiencing God's presence. So if you can spare a prayer, I would ask you to say one for Donna. As the song, O Danny Boy goes: "Say an Ave for me." Or pray that wonderful line: "Saints of God come to meet her. Receive her soul and present her to God the most high. And where Lazarus is poor no longer, may she have eternal rest."

The whole church, it seems, prayed for Archbishop Borders. Donna would be pleased that others would remember her. And, as a humble rectory employee, we might give to Donna one of the titles given to the pope: a servant of the servants of God!