

Ultimately, only God matters

What will be important to us 25 years after we have died? I ask that question because Nov. 10 marks the 25th anniversary of my mother's death. The woman whom I could not imagine living without, at one point in life, is in fact someone I have lived without for 25 years!

I'm not sure what happens in heaven. Obviously, we speak of the Beatific Vision, seeing God face to face. We think of joining in God's praise with all the saints and angels forever.

(I remember a "Far Side" cartoon showing a man seated on a cloud with his halo on, thinking to himself, "Hmm, I should have brought a magazine!" I'm sure heaven is not that - eternal boredom!

But what on earth is of interest to those in heaven? Allow me to offer a few possibilities.

First, all those they have loved on earth would be of eternal interest to those in heaven. While they are now held in an eternal embrace by an Eternal Love, their hearts stay connected to those they have loved on earth. There have been times in these past 25 years when things have happened in my life that I'm sure that my mother has had a hand in. We pray to the official saints, the canonized saints, for their help. Why would we think of our personal saints as being less important or less helpful?

(As an aside, the late Father Janaites always said that he never wanted to be a canonized saint. "I don't want to spend all of eternity looking for peoples' keys and wristwatches.")

In addition to still loving in heaven those they loved on earth, those in heaven are probably amazed by all the petty things we worry about. I feel fairly certain that they are not at all caught up in the 'drama' we create in our lives: "Will he? Won't he? Did she? Didn't she?" "She can't get away with that!" "He can't do that," and on and on. We create the drama in our own minds, blame the drama in our minds on those outside us, and then we have quarrels between friends and families, and wars

between nations. I'm sure that they feel compassion for our pain and wish we would stop inflicting it on ourselves. But they are no longer caught up in our drama since in heaven there is no more pain, self-inflicted or otherwise.

The one thing I am sure about those in heaven is that they now realize that, ultimately, only God matters. I've used this parable before: Ask yourself who sat or stood where you are sitting and standing right now 10,000 years ago. What do you know about them? Obviously, the answer is nothing. Now ask yourself who will sit or stand where you are currently sitting or standing 10,000 years from today. What will they know about you? Obviously, again, the answer is nothing. Our fame or our fortune, our power or influence, have no ultimate meaning. In the grand sweep of history, only God will remember. Only God will never forget us.

I think one of the painful parts of purgatory is discovering right after death just how much God loved us and how little we returned that love. What a painful process of purging it must be to let go of our selfishness and self-preoccupation to finally be expansive enough to open ourselves to God in all of God's fullness.

So, what on earth still matters to my mother in heaven? The short answer is not much! But what does matter is still most important. Her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren matter to her. Her friends still alive matter to her. This so human - yet still so divine - church still matters to her.

And in that perhaps not-too-distant future when I pass from this earthly plane to the heavenly plane, I suspect my mother will be one of the first to greet me. And then I will experience what I already know. Only love matters. And since all people and all things are one in God, only God ultimately matters.