

DEATH as *Birth*



*The babe in the manger, delivered safely from the
womb of Mary into the loving arms of Mary.
He was born into this world to stay a short time
for a divine mission.*

by Juliann Stella Tuck

Since the passing of our precious 17 year-old daughter, Maria Rose, from an indeterminable cause on June 19, 2012, I have pondered life and death from a renewed perspective. One of the most thought provoking and comforting stories surrounding death that I read years ago was told by Father Oscar Lukefahr in *“We Believe, a Survey of the Catholic Faith”*.

Father Lukefahr tells the story of Annie, an elderly woman in a wheelchair reminiscing about the birth of her first child and a dream she had just before he was born. In the dream, she has a conversation with the child in her womb. She tries to describe to her child what this world will be like. The story goes something like this:

“Hello, Johnny. *What? Who are you?* I’m your mother. *Mother? What’s a mother?* Johnny, I’m the one, along with your father, who brought you into this world. *Oh? Then where are you? Why can’t I see you?* You can’t see me because you’re living inside me. But soon you will be born, and then we will

see each other. *Born? What does that mean?* Well, Johnny, you’ve been growing, and there’s not enough room for you there. The life support system that’s keeping you alive won’t work much longer. *You mean I’m going to die?* No, you won’t die, you’ll just begin to live in a new way. *Why should I believe that? I can’t see you. Maybe you’re not even there. Maybe I’m all alone and just imagining this.*

Johnny, you don’t think you just came from nothing do you? Where you’re living is real, but the world is much bigger than you think. When you’re out here, you’ll grow tall and strong; you’ll run and play; you’ll make friends; you’ll go hiking in the woods; you’ll have a puppy, you’ll....

Wait a minute. What are friends? What are woods? What's a puppy? Friends and woods and puppies are....Johnny, I can't explain them because there's nothing like them where you are. The more I try to explain, the more impossible they'll seem to you. You'll just have to wait and see.

Now I know I'm imagining this. I'm going to die, and I am afraid. Johnny, don't be afraid. I know this sounds hard to believe, and I can't really explain it to you, but it's real. Maybe this will help, do you know what your feet are? *Yes, and I have ten toes too!* That's right, Johnny. But what good are they to you in there? What can you use them for? Nothing. Right, Johnny? But, you have them because there is an earth here for you to walk and run on. Your feet wouldn't make any sense if there weren't a world out here. Can you believe that? *I'd like to, really I would. But I'm afraid.* I know, and what you're afraid of, your birth, will have to come. There will be some pain and darkness. But then there will be light and life, more life than you can imagine. All I can say is that I've been through what you'll

go through, and I'll be waiting here for you with open arms and a big smile. What you think of as death, you'll really find is birth!

Johnny was born two weeks after that dream, had grown into a fine man, and was coming soon to visit Annie at the nursing home.

Annie. A voice startled her out of her thoughts. An aide perhaps? She turned, but saw no one, just the crucifix on the wall above her dresser. *Annie.* She heard the voice again, but this time it seemed to come from within. She understood. "Yes, Lord?"

Annie. *It's almost time for you to come home.* You mean I'm going to die? *No, Annie, soon you will be born. You'll soon begin to live in a new way.* Lord, I'm afraid. Sometimes I doubt and wonder if you are really there. I wish I could see you face to face. *That's not possible now, Annie, because I'm on the other side of death. But you don't think you came from nowhere do you?* No, but sometimes heaven seems like a fairy tale. *Well, I can't describe heaven anymore than you could explain*

your world to Johnny before he was born. I suppose so, Lord, but I'm still afraid.

I know, Annie, but think of your heart. Has it ever been really satisfied? Have you ever been completely happy? No, because your heart is made for God and for eternity. Johnny's feet were made for walking on earth, and your heart was made for heaven. I'm still afraid, Lord. Yes, Annie, and what you fear will have to come. There will be some pain and darkness. But then there will be light and life, more life than you can imagine. All I can say is that I've been through what you'll go through, and I'll be waiting here for you with open arms and a big smile. And what you think of as death, you'll find is really birth!

'Amen, Lord,' Annie whispered. And she knew that her dream was real."

Just as a baby in the womb has no idea of the abundant light, love, life and joy that await him/her after birth, so have we no idea of the light, love, life and joy that await us after God calls us home!

"Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man what things God has prepared for those that love Him."

~ 1 Corinthians 2:9

I remember Mother Angelica reminding us that our souls do not die; our bodies, yes, but not our souls. It is our souls that enliven and animate our bodies; it is our souls that make us who we are. Remember the verse from the gospel of Matthew? "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul." (Mt. 10:28). So, there is nothing to fear as long as we "have lived with care of our salvation...and have received the efficacious remedies of the Holy Sacraments." (St. Francis de Sales in "Consoling Thoughts on Eternity") The only thing to fear is dying with our souls



not in the state of grace; “but fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell”. (Mt. 10:28). To be separated from the love of God should be our only fear. For many who know and have accepted that they are going to die, their main fear is the welfare of the loved ones they will leave behind. Do not fear! We can be assured that God will surely keep our loved ones in His care..besides we will be in heaven interceding for them!

We, who are alive on the earth, can consider ourselves to be “in the womb of Mary”, so to speak. We can place ourselves under her maternal protection, doing our best to be obedient children, and she will nurture us and care for us until God’s appointed time for our birth into heaven.

“Truly I say to you, unless you become converted and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven”. (Mt. 18:3) Mary will help us complete the mission for which we were born, always leading us to her Son.

In Father Ronald Rolheiser’s, “*Dying into Safe Hands*”, he uses these words to console a mother who has lost her teenage son:

“Simply [put] that this young boy is now in more-loving, more-tender, gentler, and safer hands than ours, that there’s a mother on the other side to receive him and give him the nurturing he still needs, just as there was one on this side when he was born. No one is born, except into a mother’s arms. That’s an image we need to keep before us in order to more healthily imagine death.

Perhaps no image then is as apt, as powerful, as consoling, and as accurate in terms of picturing what happens to us when we die and awake to eternal life as is the image of a mother holding and cradling



her newborn child. When we die, we die into the arms of God and surely we're received with as much love, gentleness, and tenderness as we were received in the arms of our mothers at birth. Moreover, surely we are even safer there than we were when we were born here on earth. I suspect too that more than a few of the saints will be hovering around, wanting their chance to cuddle the new baby. And so it's okay if we die before we're ready, still in need of nurturing, still needing someone to help take care of us, still needing a mother. We're in safe, nurturing, gentle hands."

Since Maria passed away, I try not to use words like "died" and "memory". For the truths of our faith tell us that Maria is not dead, her body yes, but not her soul, not what made Maria be Maria. She is much more alive than we are. She resides just beyond the thin veil. Yes, I have memories of her, but I also have a living relationship with her. Can I hear her voice, no, but I know she is here. By the grace of God, I have already made memories with her since her passing. She

is actively interceding for us and doing her best to make sure we join her when we have our birth into heaven. When we enter into eternity, our time on earth will seem but the blink of an eye. This life is so very short compared to eternity!

Where is this thin veil? Is it somewhere in outer space; somewhere over the rainbow? I believe it is much closer than that. My faithful friend, Keri Tarrant, told me that it's like Maria's face is right in my face; she is so close. Father Ben Leudtke told me, "When you receive Holy Communion, Maria is closer to you than she was when she was within your womb." How beautiful! When we are baptized, our bodies become "temples of the Holy Spirit". God resides within our very souls. Where God resides, all the heavenly inhabitants reside.

When I receive Jesus in Holy Communion, I greet all of heaven. "Welcome God the Father; welcome Jesus, welcome Holy Spirit. Hello, Mother Mary and Good Father St. Joseph. Hello to all of the angels and saints, etc." Jesus is the only one truly present in

the Holy Eucharist, but where he is, all of heaven is. To ponder this reality, is to realize that our loved ones who have gone before us are not so very far away at all! They are truly with us.

Our Blessed Mother Mary's loving arms await our earthly passing

just as they awaited Jesus' earthly birth. Mary will deliver us into the loving embrace of our Divine Savior, Jesus. When that time comes for us, how the angels and saints will sing! "Glory to God in the highest for one of His beloved children has come home!" O' what a hope we have in Jesus!

A little prayer I penned by the bedside of my dying mother in August of 2013 as I cried out to God:

*"Oh Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."
(Jn. 6:68) You have the answers to the mysteries of life.*

Within You lies the hope of joy amidst sorrow,
of wisdom over foolishness,
of peace over unrest,
of knowledge over ignorance,
of charity over apathy,
of hope over despair,
of good over evil,
of light over darkness,
of right judgment over chaos,
of piety over irreverence,
of innocence over guilt and corruption,
of contrition over obstinance,
of selflessness over selfishness,
of optimism over pessimism,
of fortitude over cowardice,
of purity over impurity,
of sanctity over profanity,
of life over death.

In You lies our soul's desire. Have mercy on us, and lead us through this vale of tears to our eternal home with You and the saints. Amen.

*“The accidents of life separate us from
our dearest friends, but let us not despair,
God is like a looking glass in which souls
see each other. The more we are united to
Him by love, the nearer we are to
those who to belong to Him.”*

~ St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

*In loving memory and ever heightened anticipation of reunion with
Maria Rose Tuck, Leonard and Rita Farr, Dennis Tuck and all of our beloved
family members and friends who were born into heaven before us.*
