

*Requiem Sermon for Edward Jahn*  
*by Fr. Garrin W. Dickinson*  
*Holy Nativity, Plano*  
*17 August, 2006*

We are here today to do two things. First, something specific: We are here to mourn for Ed. Those of us who knew and loved him are here to say our goodbyes, to remember and honor his life, and to commend him to God. We are here in the face of loss to share our grief and pain, to validate it in a way, and to help each other through it.

The second thing we are here to do is a no more human thing, but a more universal one. Every time we face a loss of this kind, we must grapple with the fact of death. Even if you had never known Ed, this service would be for you. Death is the great universal, and the universally unknown. But it is also an icon of fallenness. It is the most poignant example of the separation and loss and pain and evil all around us. It points to our alienation from God. And it is the most radical separation from one another that we can experience. When God told Adam that disobedience in Eden would bring death, he meant more than that Adam's body would return to the dust of which it was formed. He meant that Adam and Eve would experience that disintegration every day of their lives, in every aspect of their existence.

And so we face again the spectre of death in its frightening particularity: the loss of this beloved person, Ed. Our friend, our cousin. The man who always had a question, who was always learning. The man who loved people and considered them valuable. The man who served God and the church. The man who was willing to take responsibility for burdens (and people) that were not his own. The man with whom we lived and worked and laughed and argued. And it seems that death has won a round in this struggle.

So it seems to Job. He's lost everything, including his children. And he cries out for pity from his friends, who are tormenting him further with their moral theology. The assumption is that if you are suffering, then God must have done it to you. And if he has done it to you, then you must have deserved it. But from the midst of his grief, Job has a moment of clarity and prophecy. He says, "I know that my Redeemer lives". There is someone who will vindicate me, who will mediate between God and man, who will defend me before the throne of God. And by his mediation, "I shall see God."

Job was troubled, but in the midst of his trouble he had a revelation. We have already had our revelation. We know who our vindicator is. He is the very presence of God in human form. He is “the way, and the truth, and the life”. And no one sees God except through him. He is the one who has fought with death for us and conquered. What Job saw dimly from a distance we actually know. And he not only gets us the audience with God that Job craved. He prepares for us an eternal habitation in the house of God, in the presence of God.

It turns out that the universal human problem of death has a universal human solution. Each of us is prepared a particular place to abide in God’s presence for ever. But the way to that particular abode is the same for everyone. This service is a rehearsal of the light and truth that we bear to all people. As we commend our friend Ed to the place prepared for him, we proclaim the good news that Ed embraced. The way is Jesus! Not because we own him, but because he owns us, and calls us to follow him.

And so he commands us: “Let not your hearts be troubled; trust in God, trust also in me.” The difficult task that we face in this world is actually to obey that commandment. Death seems so final, so irreversible. But it is not so. The fact is that the death of our bodies is the gateway to true life. As St. Paul tells us, “things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. ... For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” Ed has not lost anything. He has gained.

Once we understand this, we would *prefer* to be finished with the transient, visible world, so that we could move on to the better things in God’s presence. St. Paul says, “We are of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. ... and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” That’s why this service is a celebration. Ed has won through to the eternal and invisible.

It is we who are still in the battle. But we do not fight alone. Every movement of ours toward God is matched by a leap of his to meet us. “He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.” And so, “We do not lose heart. ... For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison”. Even our grief and pain are steps on the way toward life. They are part of our training, just as our trust in the unseen is part of our training.

This service is one more training exercise in which we rehearse the truth once more. In Christ, life is not ended but changed, and changed for the better. In death, Ed is now freed from the death in which we still must live, struggling to trust Jesus in the midst of it. He need not any longer stand in the face of death and defy it, as we do here today. He has completed his struggle of faith, while we carry on until we rejoin him in the Father's house. This is the destination for which Ed has been released from his struggle with death. It is the destination of all who put their trust in the Lord.

May we also trust in our Lord Jesus, and so go to be with Ed there, face to face with our perfect Lord.