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My family jokes about how my dad used all 9 of his lives, as well as each of our 9 lives! He survived more medical maladies than any other person I knew. He had brain surgery, triple bypass, a kidney transplant, and multiple amputations, among many other procedures. I recall helping him get checked into ER once. After we had listed his 20th surgery on the admitting paperwork the nurse said we had recorded enough! And throughout his years, he was administered the Anointing of the Sick multiple times. But it was in his last year of his life that I could really notice the effects of his receiving this sacrament.

Because of years of high blood pressure and diabetes (for neither of which he properly took care of himself,) he ultimately ended up on dialysis. He was on it for most of the last 15 years of his life. Due to compounding problems, non-stop doctor appointments, and treatments coupled with recovery days where he was miserable, he decided his quality of life was so far compromised that he finally stopped receiving dialysis treatments. The doctors told us it would be just 3-4 days before he would end up dying. At that time, a priest friend of the family came to the hospital to administer the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Soon after, Dad was moved to a Hospice House.

During his first few days there, my cousin/his nephew, who is also a priest, came to visit and provided the sacrament of Anointing. The anointing of the sick conveys several graces and imparts gifts of strengthening in the Holy Spirit against anxiety, discouragement, and temptation, and conveys peace and fortitude (CCC 1520). These graces flow from the atoning death of Jesus Christ, for "this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, ‘He took our infirmities and bore our diseases’" (Matt. 8:17). And it was amazing to see that grace take effect! Dad was completely at peace with his decision. Each of us 5 kids, our spouses, and all the grandkids had an opportunity to spend some alone time with him, saying our goodbyes and getting the closure we all needed. But don’t read that as it being a sad time. In fact, though physical healing is never guaranteed through the Anointing of the Sick, it can be an effect. The condition under which this secondary effect can be expected to operate is stated by the Council of Trent: “When it is expedient (beneficial) for the soul’s salvation.” And somehow, my Dad, again thwarting all medical predictions, lived for 12 days. Those days were like one big party! He had friends and family show up from all the surrounding states. He received Facebook messages, cards, and phone calls from people he had encountered throughout his life. Each had something special to say: Thanks for being such a good friend, You were a role model for me, You taught me how to …, You were the life of the party, I’ll never forget how you helped me by…, and on and on. It was a time of tears, but also of laughter. We took over the lounges and guest rooms so that we could all be together. Music was played on the piano in the reception area on a daily basis. Songs were song, and memories were shared. We grilled out in the facility parking lot and fed everyone on Dad’s floor. Once everybody, including Dad, had time to come to terms with his death and was secure with his hereafter, he was able to let go. It was the most peaceful death I have ever witnessed or could even imagine.

I will never know for sure whether his last days were going to be as satisfying as they were if he had not received the Anointing of the Sick. It is my faith that lets me believe it mattered. I pray that we all may be able to receive this sacrament when our time comes, and that we may all experience as beautiful a death as my dad’s.

Blessings,

Julie Gould

This Week: faithformation@ctknsf.org

* Sunday, Feb. 3, 4-6 pm at Fellowship Hall: A Family of Faith- bring your books.
* Monday, Feb. 4, 7 pm at St. Francis de Sales Church, Lakeview: Adult Enrichment Class
* Thursday, Feb. 7, 9:30 am- 4 pm at CTK Church: Eucharistic Adoration