
A Prayer

by William G. Bartholome

The “first last Christmas” in 1994 was so bittersweet. I felt in my bones that it would be my last. Yet it was Christmas, that most special time of year. There were many tears, but much joy. Little did I know that this was just the beginning of an incredible journey. A few weeks later, a force . . . an incredible grace . . . entered my life that would nourish and transform me in ways that I had never known. Although I barely knew it, our wedding was an awesome creation of life in the face of my illness. Pam tied her life together with mine in a way that has nourished me and grown me as a human beyond my wildest imaginings:

*Thank you, God, for my partner,
my wife, my Pam.*

Over the course of these last four and a half years, I have become profoundly aware of the nature of my existence as a human being. I have come to realize that I exist suspended in, defined by, and nourished through a web of relationships. I know that I am because a man and woman conceived me into existence; because a woman bore me, birthed me, nourished me, cared for me and protected me. From a wonderful mob of siblings, I learned the lessons of sharing and loyalty and solidarity. From a long and troubled marriage and the searing pain of a divorce, I came to know that a needful love cannot maintain a relationship; that each of us is also called to sustain a solitary self.

From three incredible daughters and now a son, I have learned of the work, the joy, the pains, the satisfactions, the failings, and the letting go of being

a father. From friends, from students, and from my patients and their families, I have learned the meaning of living-in-relationship:

*Thank you, God, for my parents, my siblings,
my children, my web of being.*

During this special time, I have been blessed in ways that I had never imagined possible. I have come to an awareness of myself and my life that few human beings are ever afforded the opportunity of developing. By making the choice to live in the light of death, I opened myself up to a process of discovery that continues to this very day. I am open to the beauty and intensity and richness and goodness of the world around me in ways that I had never experienced. I continue to be stunned and overwhelmed over and over again with this kind of living. I have come to know what it is like to actually live in the present . . . to be totally alive in a moment of time:

*Thank you, God, for this opportunity to be truly
alive.*

I have also been allowed to come to the discovery that this precious gift we call life is ours to make of what we will. This above ground, “fleshy phase” of our existence is a precious opportunity we are given to experience this world, to build bonds of caring and love with each other, to come to know what we are called to do here, and to create a legacy that will endure.

Over the last four years, I have attempted to share with all of you — but particularly with our children — my love, my spirit, my mind/heart. In

the meditations I have shared with you, I have given you the gifts of my discoveries. I want more than anything to be for you a "way-shower," a guide, a teacher:

Thank you, God, for this opportunity to guide.

Living in this process has also grounded me in the awesome reality of Death. I have come to know the skeleton I am in the process of becoming in ways I never imagined possible. I feel His presence in my body in my every waking moment. Yet, I am no longer terrified by this reality. I have come to understand that it is Death that is the wellspring that drives our lives. Without Death, our lives would be pointless and empty. It is Death that wakes us to living. It is Death that prods us to discover and create ourselves and our lives in the few precious years we are given to share with each other here with our Mother Earth. I have encouraged you to embrace this strange travelling companion. His presence in your life will enrich your journey:

*Thank you, God, for giving us this gift of life/
death.*

This journey has also opened up in me a renewed awareness of the relationship between my being and Father Sun and the Cosmos beyond. As I told you, living with Death on my shoulder has opened up in me an awareness of God's haunting presence. I know that God is. For me, beyond this awesome presence there is nothing but dense mystery. Yet, this one step of faith . . . this simple conviction transforms me and my life.

At St. Andrew's Church, I now go to communion. I go to "feed on Him in my heart through faith." I am once again being spiritually nourished. Our service ends with the saints gathering around the altar and reciting an affirmation of purpose:

Go forth into the world in peace, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good, render to no one evil for evil, strengthen the fainthearted, support the weak, help the afflicted, honor all people, love and serve the Lord rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit:

Thank you, God, for bringing me back to your presence.

I have been so blessed. You cannot possibly know the depth of my gratitude at having had these precious years to share with you. This special time of Christmas calls for celebration, joy, and acknowledgment of the multitude of gifts that fill our lives. This whole journey has been for me an incredible gift. I have had the opportunity to experience life and love and joy and peace beyond my wildest dreams:

Thank you, God, for this great gift.

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