



Peaceful Spirit, Dolorous Heart

by Mr. Lafayette A. Lim

All true Christians believe in life after death. To live with God forever in Heaven is our only end goal in life. This is the only end goal that really matters because whatever else we achieve in life is but worthless if we end up in eternal separation from God. Since death is the beginning of eternal life, it should bring Christians much joy, like many of the saints.

But given our human nature, we still grieve and feel sad about the passing of a loved one.

Even before the death of Daddy in 1997, I had taught myself to believe that happiness is a possible choice for any situation in life. It is, in fact, the best choice. In terms of death, it is a celebration of a life lived well. But it is quite easier said than done, especially when it happens in your own family. For me, it changed me in a big way.

When Daddy died, whatever excitement I had for my job disappeared, and I had never recovered from it, even until now. I used to be at the forefront of my team's work, working even at night. I was looking forward to the day when the big goal me and my team set out to accomplish will finally be achieved, the completion of our project. I wanted to make Daddy proud of me because he had provided so much trust and confidence in my abilities and plans despite his having much more experience than me.

After his death, I became passive. I didn't want to work myself to death. I didn't want to be directly involved in something which will be affected when I am gone. I was still excited about getting the job done, but I just simply became less involved because my only inspiration for finishing the work I set out to complete was Daddy. Even studying again didn't help.

This is not to say that my reaction was excusable. But that was what happened to me. Each of us behave and react in our own way. And I had already thought that I could have responded in a better way. But that is in the past, a past which damage can no longer be repaired, a shattered dream that will never ever be.

Just like in Daddy's case, death was not even in my mind concerning my sister Gaye. So, it came as a total shock. My life will never be the same without her.

I was on the plane going to Manila. The plane had landed and we were getting ready to deplane. I turned on my cellphone and my wife, Jen, was calling. She told me nobody was going to fetch me, and when I asked why, she told me Gaye was gone. She died while the plane was on the air.

Everything became surreal after that.

As I made my way out the plane and to the airport, my legs were shaking and I had to walk slowly. My mind was blank, and all I can think of was "to see is to believe". I felt so alone.

My legs were still shaking as I waited for my checked in baggage. Why am I shaking like this when my heart and mind are blank? Then I remembered that while I was in the plane, I was wondering why I started to feel unusually cold sometime during the flight. I didn't know that it was to be a cold and gloomy day in my life. If only the flight wasn't 2 hours delayed, I could have been there when she said goodbye. Stupid plane.

As I rode the car to the hospital, I had nothing on my mind. It was like being in a dream world. Reality struck hard when I saw my Mom and sister Ivy outside the hospital morgue. I had wanted to hug both of them, but when Mom cried out that Gaye was gone, I hugged her and cried like I never cried before in my life. Although I cry easily, it was the first time in my adult life that I cannot contain the anguish I felt deep down. I wept loudly. I had lost my sister, someone I loved so dearly.

I didn't even get the chance to say goodbye, to give her one last hug.

“In my distress I called upon the Lord; to my God I cried for help.
From His temple He heard my voice, and my cry to Him reached His ears.” (Psalm 18:6)

It's been more than a month now since she went home to God, and I am constantly encouraged by the strong faith of my Mom and my brothers and sisters. I had constantly tried to keep watch of them during the wake, worried that Satan will use this time to demonize them into questioning God and losing faith.

I would cry out in anguish twice more, once during the wake in Manila and another during the burial. Many nights the gloom of my earthly loss enveloped me, a sadness and sorrow from which my soul finds comfort in God, but my heart finds no relief from the terrible pain.

Several times I was tempted by thoughts of anger, doubt, regret, and even guilt. At times so many questions bring me to the brink of despair. Why didn't I fly to Manila earlier? Why didn't I spend more time with her? Why didn't I call her more? Why didn't I take her pain and sickness more seriously? Why didn't I do much more for her?

But I never gave in to the temptations. And I never ever questioned or doubted my Lord and my God, my All. The Lord has continued to strengthen me and my family. Our faith in Him is solid and built on a firm and sure foundation. It inspired me to reject any evil thoughts that attacked me in such a time of weakness.

“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return;
the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” (Job 1:21)

During the wake, someone approached me and told me in Chinese to “pray for my brothers and sisters so that they will believe in the Lord.” Normally, I would have scowled and confronted such an insensitive and offensive statement, but instead I just smiled. Gaye has always been for me a model of calm and stability in the face of troubles and difficulties. It was only after I thought about it later on that I got slightly annoyed at the ignorance of such an absurd suggestion.

Of course they believe in the Lord. The fact that it would even be in question stems from the fact that many people don't really know what they are talking about. If what they believed in was scrutinized under the light of Truth in the Bible and in Christian history, their belief is built on a foundation of sand. Maybe if their parent or brother or sister or child died, they would not speak like that. I wanted to feel pity for those who "know not what they are doing", but the Christian response should be one of charity. For the love of God for us is nothing short of charitable love. Where would we all be without the charity of God? How can we do any less?



Even early on during her sickness, Gaye was already ready to meet her Maker. So why the sadness in my heart? While I am happy that she has finally rested after months of suffering, the sadness is more of a self-centered nature. Simply put, I'm gonna miss her so much. She had endured tremendous pain and fought very hard to live for the sake of her family who didn't want to give her up. Until the very end she still hoped with us for a miracle. In the end God prevails. It was her time to rest in the arms of her Heavenly Father. Blessed be the Name of the Lord!

I'll miss her messages telling me how she misses my babies. I'll miss her "cutie baby!" replies to my pictures messages. I'll miss her love and hugs. I'll miss our hours and hours of chatting almost every day, sharing and discussing about our troubles at work and concerns about our family. I'll miss editing speeches with her. I'll miss her comments and corrections to the articles I write. I'll miss her questions about Christianity. I'll miss her "hadow", "ukay", "is-niff", "hwa hwa", "harrump" and "woohooo".

It's hard to imagine that she is gone. And while my spirit is at peace, my heart cries out for my dear sister, and my mind cannot make itself to think that she is gone.

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is, the Church." (Colossians 1:24)

During Lent of 2005 and 2006, Gaye and I decided to do a serious fast. In 2005 we fasted for 1 week for the many sins of and against the Church. In 2006, we fasted for 40 days for peace and unity in our family. Last Lent, I fasted for Gaye's complete healing. But God had other plans. If He would have wanted me to fast on bread and water for 40 days I would have done it. But He had other plans. My God, my All.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed,
so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence,
work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12)

One of the things I used to discuss with Gaye is the necessity to strive for perfection. All over the New Testament, God has warned us that nothing unclean will ever enter Heaven except those written in the Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). Well, Revelation 20:12 is clear enough that in the Book of Life, the dead were judged by what they had done. We are justified by our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, but we will be saved based on the judgment of what we have done as Christians, a judgment that will determine if we will be listed in

the Book of Life. That's why "for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead." (James 2:26) Salvation is a gift, but a gift can be rejected. We have to be perfect like God. Gaye had told me "But that is so hard!" It is hard. That's why we work with fear and trembling.

"It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." (Romans 8:16-17)

There are still questions I wish God will answer me soon. These are not questions that doubt or rebel, but those that just simply and humbly seek answers. So while I await the plan of God to unfold, I continue to live a life of total surrender and complete dependence to His Will, questioning nothing of what life brings while doing my best to be obedient to His commandments and to do His works.

During the Mass at the cemetery for the 40 days after Gaye's departure, my spirit is still at peace, and my heart is still dolorous. As the choir sings the final hymn, I imagine Gaye smiling down at us and singing the same words.

Going home, going home, I am going home
Quiet like some still day, I am going home

It's not far, just close by, through an open door
Work all done, care laid by, never fear no more

Mama Mary's there expecting me, Daddy's waiting, too
Lot's of faces gathered there, many friends I knew

I'm just going home

Goodbye, Gaye, I will miss you forever.