

PRAY God of the living, all that lives testifies to your presence with us. Keep our eyes awake to the people and world around us. Help us see the good we can do for one another. Amen.

by Ed Fasterly

After my dad died, my family seemed to have died as well. I felt this most on Sundays—our family days. Sundays meant hanging out with our parents. We usually went to church, had breakfast out, and then Dad unveiled the plan for the day—rollerblading, biking, a trip to a museum, or a movie. He always cooked an unusual dinner that tasted great.

I had six other days with my friends, so I didn't think spending a few hours catching up with my mom and dad—and Abbey—too much of a sacrifice. She was two years older. We got along, even though she always called me Scrub. On family days, one of us gravitated towards each parent and not so much to each other.

When Dad died, something changed in Abbey. When she moved to New York for film school, it seemed she had been that far away for a long time; she just hadn't moved there yet.

We called each other, but we never talked about our dad until my senior year. Abbey was home for her winter break and told me, "We have to hang out somewhere because hanging out in Mom's house will drive me nuts."

We planned a day at the Walker Museum of Modern Art. We walked the galleries, occasionally saying, "I like this one." At some I just shrugged. Abbey still felt miles away, like another visitor to the museum.

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

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SPIRIT



A DAY WITH ABBEY

Then we saw a long neon light mounted on the wall with a shorter black light atop it. The piece was called, "Untitled." I started laughing. Pretty soon Abbey was laughing, too. Between laughs I saw that Abbey had stopped laughing and begun to cry. I instinctively hugged her. I'd broken down like this

before but never to her—one second laughing; the next second laughter awakening a deep, sleeping pain.

"I'm sorry," she choked out, "I miss him so much,"

"Me, too," I said, "Let's go get some coffee." We went to a nearby café.

"I can't believe you drink that stuff," I said, handing her a miniature

mug of black liquid. "That's concentrated ulcer right there."

"It's *espresso*," she retorted.

"I beg your pardon, *darling*."

Abbey laughed. "What are you talking about, Scrub? You're drinking, what—a Soy Chai Latte?"

I nodded. "You haven't called me Scrub since before dad died."

Abbey sipped her espresso. "I was never around."

"Yeah," I said, "you took the car and disappeared."

"I didn't disappear," she said, talking slowly. "I was out ... with friends ... it was too hard to be in the house. It was like Dad held us all together, like when he died so did our family—that glue that held it all together just came apart."

"I know," I said. I had felt the same way for years.

"The house started to seem like a shell for our family. I just couldn't stand having to deal with it all the time."

Abbey got a glassy look in her eyes, and looked down into her cup, as if the strength to remember were hidden somewhere at the bottom.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

All are alive to God.

NARRATOR: Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came forward to Jesus to pose this problem.

SADDUCEE: Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife and no child, the brother shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Suppose there were seven brothers. The first one married and died childless, so the second brother married the widow, then the third, and so on. All seven died without leaving her any children. Finally the widow herself died. At the resurrection, whose wife will she be? Remember, seven married her.



JESUS 1: Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, but those judged worthy of a place in the age to come and of resurrection from the dead do not. They cannot die anymore because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.

JESUS 2: Moses in the passage about the bush showed that the dead rise again when he called Yahweh the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not God of the dead but of the living. All are alive to God.

Luke 20.27-38

"Like three strangers living together with only death in common?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said, "how could you stand it?"

"I don't know," I answered, "I guess I figured that I should stick around in case anyone wanted to start making it into a home again, you know?"

She sipped her espresso. "Do you remember the day we got pulled out of school?"

I was in eighth grade at the time and still at the junior high. Abbey went to the high school down the road, so I got home before she did.

"Yeah," I said, "Mr. Kent sent me down to the office for a message and one of Mom's friends drove me home."

Abbey got a glassy look in her eyes, and looked down into her cup, as if the strength to remember were hidden somewhere

at the bottom. "I was at an all-school Mass in the gym—1,600 people all sitting on the gym floor. I was at half court with Megan and Chloe, and we were talking. Brother Michael pointed his finger right at my head and had me stand up—right in the middle of the gym while everyone stared at me. Even the girl doing the reading stared at me. I thought I was in so much trouble.

"I gave this little wave on my way out, and then I saw my counselor, Mrs. Z, and the principal. They told me Mom called and that Mrs. Z would drive me home. Dad was so out of it," she continued.

"It was like he had Alzheimer's or something," I said, "I remember him sitting there in the chair, and we were sitting at his feet and he said..."

"Go get the kids," said Abbey.

"I don't really remember much after that," I said.

"You got up and kissed him on



top of his head and went in the other room.”

I remembered.

“Did I ever tell you what Dad said to me after you left?” Abbey asked. “He told me to put out my hand. So I did. Then he made it look like he was holding something invisible and small in his hand; then lowered it into mine. When he opened his hand and nothing was there, I looked up to him and he said ‘You keep that.’”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. After five years of utter silence about the biggest event of our lives, Abbey spilled her guts to me. I was in awe.

“I think that’s why I apologized in the museum,” she said.

I protested, “It’s okay. I know it’s a cliché, but it’s okay to cry.”

“No,” she interrupted, “I’m not sorry about crying. I realized when Dad gave that invisible thing to me that he was giving me part of himself. I was gone all the time because it was just too much. I know that I wasn’t there for you or Mom. I think about it a lot. But I think that glue that Dad was—how he held us together—that’s what he gave me, and I haven’t done that. I haven’t even tried.”

She started crying again. I felt almost too overwhelmed to speak.

“I never knew that,” I said. “We never talk about Dad. There’s a part of him here as we talk about him.”

She smiled through her tears. Then she banged her empty cup on the table and said, “Next round’s on you, Scrub.”

QUESTIONS 1 What glue holds your family together and keeps your spirit alive? 2 When have you experienced someone you love with you as Scrub and Abbey do their dad? 3 What is God’s relationship to every human person? 4 How are we alive to God?

Holding life sacred

“All are alive to God,” Jesus says in the final words of Sunday’s gospel. Jesus is arguing a hot topic of his time—resurrection of the dead. He argues that when God speaks to Moses from the burning bush, a story from the book of **Exodus**, God says, “I am the God of your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” This shows these ancestors are alive to God.

If Jesus were debating hot issues today, he could argue from the same book of the bible against capital punishment. The book of **Exodus** contains the ten commandments. In his **Sermon on the Mount** Jesus tells his followers not only to keep the fifth commandment, “Thou shall not kill,” but to deal with their anger toward their brothers and sisters (Matthew 5.21-24).

If he were debating hot issues today, Jesus might also talk about abortion and euthanasia, which like capital punishment are also life issues. The Catholic Church teaches respect for the life of the fetus from its beginning because it is a human being from the moment of conception. Ending a life is morally wrong.

In arguing for the right to life of a fetus, many people pit the life of the unborn against the rights of women to make choices about their lives and bodies. The Church is well-known for being pro-life, teaching the sacredness

**You shall not kill.
Human life is sacred,
involving God’s creative
action from the
beginning and God’s
purposes to the end.**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church #2258, 2270-71
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of the human fetus. The Church is also pro-woman, teaching that women are full human persons capable of thinking, choosing, and loving.

Most women value life and want to carry a child to birth. Women for whom poverty and violence threaten their capacity to carry and raise a child need support.

In his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II says that God, in giving life, demands that each person love, respect, and promote life. Human life comes from God. Only God can end a human life. The human person is sacred. The Catholic Church teaches that when one is terminally ill, one does not need to choose extraordinary means to stay alive, but technology raises questions. When is a person really dead? When is it right to stop a respirator or feeding tube?

The Catholic Church teaches that the duty to love one’s neighbor as one’s self gives one the right to self defense; we have no obligation to

love our neighbor more than ourselves. It also gives people in legitimate authority the right to render an aggressor unable to inflict harm and insure people’s safety and the order of society.

Jesus was a victim of the death penalty.



The bible contains two testaments.

Christians call Israel's holy writings the Old Testament and refer to their own sacred writings as the New Testament. Both testaments give witness to God's loving actions in our human history. The Old Testament remembers all God did for the people of Israel; the New Testament remembers Jesus, his death and resurrection and the birth of Christian communities.

Sunday's gospel is a passage from the New Testament that makes more sense the more one knows about Israel's scriptures.

1. Who are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and when did they live? 2. Who is Moses and when did he live? 3. Why does a brother have to marry a dead brother's wife?

Answers: 1. Genesis, chapters 12-50. 2000-1500 B.C. 2. Moses led the Hebrew



slaves out of Egypt about 1250 B.C. 3. See the levirate law, Deuteronomy 25.5-10.

Israel and its religious traditions almost vanished from memory. Always a small nation, Israel lay in the path of the superpowers of the ancient Middle East. In 721 B.C. Assyrian armies (from the region that is Iraq today) destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, home to ten Israelite tribes. In 587 B.C. Babylonian armies (from the region that is Iran today) destroyed the southern kingdom of Judah, home to two Israelite tribes. Jerusalem, its walls and temple, lay in ruins. The Babylonians marched most able-bodied Israelites into

exile in Babylon, an exile that lasted 50 years.

To preserve Israel's religious identity, priests in exile became holy scrapbookers. They collected Israel's religious traditions in what grew into the First Testament. Slowly Israel became people of the book.

The priests braided together four strands of tradition—Y, E, D, P. The Yahwist tradition (Y) comes from among the southern tribes of Judah. The Elohist tradition (E) comes from among the northern tribes.

The Yahwist tradition refers to God as Yahweh (*Lord* in English, see Genesis 2-3). Jews never speak God's name aloud but say Adonai (Lord) instead. The Elohist tradition refers to God as Elohim (*God* in English, see Genesis 17). Sometimes the bible tells two versions of the same story because the priests saved both traditions.

The Y and E strands tell the sagas of Israel's earliest ancestors, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachel. Israel's 12 tribes descend from them. Y and E also tell the story of Moses leading the Hebrew slaves' escape from Egypt and making a covenant with God, then settling in Canaan. These are the books of Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Leviticus.

The scrapbookers already had the book called Deuteronomy (D). In 622 B.C., three decades before the exile began, the high priest Hilkiah found this scroll in the temple. *Deuter* means *second*. Deuteronomy is a second telling of Israel's escape from Egypt and making a covenant with God. King Josiah had used this book to urge a reform—to worship no other gods but Yahweh alone.

The writer of Deuteronomy also preserved the records of the kings who ruled after David united the 12 tribes into a kingdom. The books 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings contain these annals.

The Old Testament prepares for the New and the New Testament fulfills the Old; the two shed light on each other; both are true Word of God.

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The priestly collectors create the fourth strand of tradition themselves (P). They place the story of God creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh at the beginning of the testament (Genesis 1). The priests collect many laws and directions for worship.

Besides history and law, the Old Testament includes the writing of 16 of Israel's prophets, 150 prayers called psalms, and a book of proverbs. From the late centuries before Christ, the First Testament also includes in its library several collections of wisdom, books full of sayings and proverbs used to educate young people in awe and reverence for God.

FAITH in ACTION

1 Read the two creation stories that begin Genesis, Genesis 1 from the priestly tradition (P) and Genesis 2-3 from the Yahwist tradition (Y). How do we benefit from having both stories? What do we learn about the mystery of God in each story? 2 Read Exodus 19-20. Find the Y and E strands of the story by paying attention to the name for God (Lord in Y, God in E). Exodus 19.3-6 comes from the D tradition. What is the flavor of each tradition?