

Journals of a mother about Daniel #8

Sat June 22 2017 Daniel's 14th day

(See <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel> for more journals from Daniel's mother.)

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Written Saturday morning, 8:03, Dallas time

Now I write from the perspective of one who has not just lost and grieved her son, and awaited the return of his remains, but now has also buried him.

Daniel's body arrived at the church Thursday evening, around 8. We had hoped for 7:15 ish. We had hoped for a brief preparing of him, then a short time for family with him, and then a pannakhida with him around 8, with his friends who had also come. People had been waiting, some all day, some at least for a couple of hours already, here at the church. He arrived in a state that was... disappointing. He required a fair amount of preparation, before we could bring in Daniel's nieces and nephews. The adult family members were all-hands-on deck, doing things they never would have thought they would have the need or the strength to do. But they did.

We didn't begin the Pannakhida till 10pm. Then we began the continuous Psalter reading, in rotations. People started filtering out. Those of us who stayed napped in snatches on chairs or the floor or an air mattress set up in the hall. The church was freezing. Because of the state of Daniel's remains we had to keep the church at 60. 60 feels very cold when one is grieving, and weary, and still. We bundled in jackets and blankets. Daniel was covered with the quilt from my bed and then with the daddy quilt. The daddy quilt is about 50 or more years old, made by my mother-in-law for my husband when he was a child. He used it well, then passed it down to our son Tim H. He used it well. It is worn out, beyond repair. Tim had used the quilt as padding when transferring the coffin to the church (Tim H made that coffin, lovingly, with rounded, sanded handles and silky smooth sides and mitered edges, and a beautiful cross, made of red heartwood that Tim M got. Daniel's nieces designed the cross.) The daddy quilt was still in the van. Tim ran and got it, and tucked it in around his little brother.

In the morning we served a requiem liturgy. Vladyka Peter was there. He travels continuously, and is in significant pain, also continuously. In spite of his own heavy travel schedule and our continuously-changing schedule, he was there, to console us and to pray with us. He presided over the funeral service. Thank you, Vladyka, for your kindness and love and anchoring presence.

The Liturgy ended. Friends of Daniel's began arriving. A group of young men and women with whom Daniel had gone to school, from elementary through college, began arriving in ones and twos and in larger groups. I did my best to meet as many of them individually as I could, to learn how they knew him, and to hear some kind of word about my son. I loved hearing their memories, their awe of him. He was such a fine young man. Such a fine young man. A mother could not be prouder. Such a fine young man.

My coworkers arrived. I was wrapped up in warm, tight hugs. Often no words were spoken. No words were needed. Heaving heart spoke to heaving heart. The church was quite full, with people overflowing into the hall and onto the deck. Joe had set up loudspeakers. I hope everyone could hear. The funeral itself is a bit foggy. I looked up sometimes and saw some tear-streaked faces and some stony faces. Some very focused faces, as their owners focused intently on the words. Faces with closed eyes. Faces with eyes staring into the distance. Faces, every one, of people who loved my son. Indeed, who *love* my son.

We moved Daniel into the van that would bring him to the Nativity of Christ convent in Kemp. Another Theotokos presence in the life, and death, of Daniel. I committed my son into her care, in the presence of our sweet Savior.

Traffic. Text messages back and forth from car to car about where different cars were and how to avoid an accident up ahead. FS and I were in the van with Daniel. Tim H drove. He drove very carefully.

We arrived at the convent. Most people were already there. We backed the van up to where there was a waiting gurney. Men positioned themselves to guide the coffin on the gurney to the grave site. I don't have any idea who the coffin bearers were – I simply don't remember – except I made sure Noah was there. Noah and Daniel had been dear friends for years. Indeed, Noah lived with us for a time, after Daniel went away to college. Daniel had called and asked if Noah could have his room for a while. I don't remember how long he stayed with us. 6 months? A year? Longer? I don't know. I found Suzette and Hannah. Have I spoken of them before? I do not remember. They are a mother and daughter from OU, who loved Daniel very much, one as a teacher and dean and the other as a dear friend, perhaps more, who had been seeing Daniel.

We arrived at the grave side. A blessedly brief prayer was said, after all the long prayers that have been being said. My son's coffin was lowered into the ground. Some wept quietly, some sobbed, some looked away. We took our turns putting a little shovel full of dirt into the space around my son. I took a handful of it and broke up the clots and sprinkled it. It just seemed like a mother would not want clogs of dirt in there. I know that is silly. It is where I was at the time. We began moving away.

When I was almost at the hall, a shriek and yell broke out from the graveside. I turned and ran. Did someone pass out? I ran as fast as I could. My little grandson, Gregory, whom Daniel loved so much, had tripped and fallen into the hole, hitting his head on the corner of the coffin. Tim H jumped in so fast and grabbed him up and handed him up to his mother. Gregory crying, his mother crying, probably his father crying, Tim crying. Too much. Just too much.

Jenny said to Gregory, as she wiped his eyes and brushed away dirt, "Your Uncle Daniel caught you. Your Uncle Tim picked lifted you up." He did have a pretty good gash that was dirty and would be best to be thoroughly cleaned and sutured. Just too much. No urgent care clinics in the remote town. Closest ER was 45 minutes away in a somewhat larger town. Food was packed up for Gregory and mother and father. They left in Natalie and Kevin's car. Their other children stayed behind with us at the dinner the nuns had prepared for everyone. Natalie and Kevin would bring them home in the van. We ate, talked, moved around to be able to thank as many people as we could. Ladies from the church stayed behind to help with the clean up. I had thought toasts would be offered, memories shared by various people with the group. But this was done in small groups throughout the room. Nothing about these last two weeks has been according to schedule or plan. Except God's plan.

And now many people are at home, or back at their hotel room, with all this behind them. Grief ahead, arrangements and orchestrating and organizing behind. Well, FS is not. He is at a one of the prisons he visits. He left at 5:00 this morning to go see one of his prisoners, three hours away. He has to break the horrible news to his prisoner-friend that *his* beloved 13 year old son died. To offer to this man now the solace that people have been offering to us. He said he will try to be like Fr Andre, back in Berlin.

Memory Eternal, my son. May God grant you rest in His heavenly kingdom, where there is no sickness, no sorrow, no sighing, but life everlasting. Amen.

Journals of Daniel's mother. All words are from Marina Holland except lines in Italics (such as this).

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