

I'd like to share some of the things that have happened in the days and weeks, now almost three months, since my son Daniel's repose. I do not know of the true meaning or source of any of this, and I understand we are not to place too much trust or hope in these kinds of things, but nonetheless it does grant a certain amount of comfort to a mother's soul...God is good!

A four year old at our church, who had never met Daniel as his family had only recently begun coming to our church, woke one morning 2-3 days after Daniel's death, and told his mom that he had had a dream about Daniel drowning. An angel came to Daniel, as he was drowning, and said, "I have a message for you from Jesus. You will be in heaven with Jesus." Needless to say, this was very comforting. When I saw this child a couple weeks later, he and I had this conversation:

Me: your mom told me you had a dream about Daniel.

Sebastian: Yes.

Me: Do you still remember it?

Sebastian: Part of it.

Me: Can you tell me what you remember?

Sebastian: I remember that an angel came down to him and said he had a message for him. He said that he will be in heaven with Jesus. That's all I remember.

Me: That dream is really special to me. Thank you for telling me about it.

Sebastian: another day when we came to church to pray for him I saw his picture on that table over there. I recognized him from the dream.

That's when it dawned on me that Sebastian had not known Daniel before that. But he knew him in the dream and recognized him from the dream in the picture. Glory to God.

Later, I learned more details from his mother, who confessed she had thought Sebastian might have made the dream up:

Mom: what did Daniel look like?

Sebastian: like in that picture.

Mom: what was he wearing? (she expected him to say "a swim suit" or "shorts and a t-shirt")

Sebastian: a robe and a fig leaf

Mom: a fig leaf?

Sebastian: to cover his private parts.

Mom: what did the angel look like?

Sebastian: I couldn't really see it.

Mom: What do you mean? I thought you said you saw an angel?

Sebastian: Well, it was so bright I couldn't look at it. It was bright white, brighter than the sun. I couldn't look at it. It hurted my eyes.

At which point Sebastian's mom said she "repented, and began to believe". Sebastian had never heard anything about angels being brilliantly white. He couldn't or wouldn't have made up that Daniel was wearing a robe and a fig leaf. This mom said her faith grew tremendously. Glory to God!

When I am having a hard time, thinking "what ifs...", I remind myself of this dream. Thank you, God. Thank you, Sebastian. And thank you, mom of Sebastian.

A parishioner awoke early one morning to let the dogs out. He lay back down on the couch to doze, and had a dream in which he saw Daniel, standing on a little hillock. The hill and surrounding area were hazy and faded in color, but Daniel was in very sharp relief, very clear and the colors were striking, brilliant. No words were said, but Daniel stood there with the broadest grin on his face. He wore a "crimson garment with four panels" and he was swinging a censor.

A monastic saw Daniel during Matins. Again, no words were said, but he stood there with the happiest smile on his face. He wore a crimson vestment, and he held his hands up in the air, palms upward. On one palm he held a male figure; on the other he held a female figure. This person understood the dream to indicate Daniel's support of and help in what his mother and his father would be doing. Wow.

A relative who is a counselor wrote of this experience:

Last week I had a transformative session with one of my patients. She is a woman who grew up with an alcoholic father who physically abused her mother, an older brother who sexually abused her and a string of men she has been in violent relationships with. At the beginning of treatment with me, I told her she is an alcoholic and suggested AA. To my surprise she attended and has been going to meetings ever since. She is renewing her relationship with God and finding herself after being lost for most of her life. During the next session after I listened to the funeral homily, we were talking about her anger which used to be the only emotion she expressed. We talked about kindness and forgiveness for herself and her abusers. This is often a theme for the patients I see, but on this day I felt like Daniel was standing by my shoulder during the session. The energy of the session was different and this week when we met, she told me what an impact it had on her and that she had shared it with the women in her AA groups. So, please know that Daniel is present with me even though I did not know him well and he is still spreading his kindness.

My sister, who has faith but also struggles like we all do with life's difficulties, related:

Yes, God is good – it's been too long since we've talked and I want to remember to tell you – just past Daniel's 40 days, I'd started asking for his prayers. That's when everything came together for me – peace to stay, and then job offers, and so much more. It made me all the more certain about God's timing, that we dare to question...thinking Daniel is the most pious person whom I regularly ask for prayers, and he jumped on the new God-given privilege to come before Christ with our cries for help! Memory Eternal! Thanks, Daniel!

Someone whom I have never met related the following to me:

He had just read the thank you card that I had sent him, and was preparing to write on his calendar when Daniel's 40th day would be. He stood there musing, "I wonder how Daniel is right now. I wonder if

he needs anything.” He immediately heard a clear, strong voice say to him, “Please do good works in my name.”

I have begun visiting the convent and cemetery where Daniel is buried on the fourth Friday of each month. I am on call at work the first three Fridays, from 3pm till 11pm. So on the fourth Friday, when I get off at 3 pm, I head toward the convent. I stop at Sams and pick up some things they might find useful (they will not tell me what they need, so they are stuck with what occurs to me!) They are so very kind and welcoming, so accommodating. They have dinner ready for me, although I told them that is not necessary, and they have a lovely, peaceful room I have to myself.

The first time I went Mother Barbara and I spoke at length about Daniel, about her own father’s passing, about death in general, about the goodness of God. The second time I went I had the evening to myself to read and pray. Glorious.

Both times I visited Daniel at his grave, of course. The earth is settling in – the mound is not quite so large. I bring a chair, and sit, facing toward the grave, with the cross at the other end of it. Daniel’s head would be at my feet. I face east, as Daniel will, when he arises in the second coming. I talk with Daniel. I tell him things I have been thinking and wondering and hoping and fearing. I tell him what confuses me. I tell him I love him, and I miss him, and I tell him please don’t be sad for me when he sees me crying. I tell him here on earth we still feel sadness, but up in heaven, there is nothing but joy, because they understand fully now, so he is not to be concerned by my tears. I try not to cry, but I cannot help it, and the tears in a twisted way are comforting, releasing.

Behind me is the setting sun. In front of me I see the orange and yellow colors casting lengthening shadows across the mostly-as-yet-undug field of the cemetery. I turn, and I see the blindingly brilliant yellow/orange/gold sun between the trees, and the varying hues of the clouds behind and above the trees. Wow. The sunset will forever bring Daniel close to me. Close to so many – we exchange beautiful pictures of sunsets almost daily with each other. And then come the stars...like in the Little Prince...I do not yet hear the laughing, but I have been promised I will. If you have not yet read The Little Prince, please do. It is quite profound. Made more profound by being Daniel’s recent favorite, and being so reflective of Daniel himself.

I sleep at the convent, and then in the morning I visit Daniel again. I sit there on my chair, this time facing the rising sun, as I say my Communion prayers. I attend Liturgy. I receive Communion. I pray with others for Daniel and the others reposed. I talk with new and dear friends whom I meet or re-meet, as we have lunch together. My husband has arrived, after celebrating the Liturgy at our own church up in McKinney. We go together to the cemetery one more time, and pray, and perhaps cry, and smile. I am grateful.

Yesterday was the Memorial program at OU, where Daniel went to school. Suzette, one of Daniel’s deans, and her staff arranged it. As the day approached, friends and co-workers offered words of encouragement, anticipating that this was going to be very difficult. Honestly, I was somewhat perplexed by this, because I wasn’t necessarily expecting it to be difficult. I was sad, that there was an occasion for a memorial. But I didn’t know *what* to expect. It might be beautiful. It might be empty. It

might be sad. I simply didn't know. So I wasn't *dreading* it. I just didn't know what to expect. I figured they were a step removed, and could see what I could not yet see, and therefore expected it to be difficult. They were right.

As we approached the town of Norman, we remembered the last time we'd driven up. I hadn't been there at all the spring semester...shame on me. Last fall, a bunch of us went, and joined Daniel at one of the OU games. We had a fabulous time. Such fun. We went to Turner Falls, picnicked, hiked, explored, played in the water...threw a football...it landed in the river...Daniel jumped in immediately and retrieved it...he was fine, in that river...that time...and then the tears started flowing, and then the racking sobs. That was when he was *alive*. Now, *he is not*. And I hadn't known to expect it to be hard.

We arrived; Suzette and Hannah met us and showed us where to park. We went into Suzette's office where, once again, they showered us with gifts. They prepared us for what lie ahead by explaining the program. A few minutes later Daniel's brother Tim(2) and his sister Christina arrived, and then Christina's husband Tim (3). Jenny and Natalie were not able to come. Then the President of OU, Dr David Boren arrived. He made time in his very busy schedule to sit with us there, and to walk across the street to the Memorial, and to attend the entire program. He was so very kind and supportive. He sat beside me, and looked at me several times, I think to make sure I was ok. He patted my hand once in a while to comfort me. And then we began.

Suzette spoke as Daniel's dean and professor, and the mother of Hanna, whom Daniel had been seeing last spring. She remembered what he was like in class, listening very attentively in his kicked-back way, no computer open. Always a comment, well-thought out and well-articulated, with respectful acknowledgement of the opinions of others who had spoken before him. He challenged his professors, she said. After an in-class pizza party at the end of the semester, Daniel returned to help clean up. Her last image of him was of receiving a stack of empty pizza boxes from her, to take to the trash.

Then other deans and professors and friends spoke of Daniel, one by one, some with prepared comments, some with spur of the moment comments. I was touched by every single one of them. They spoke from their hearts, often with tears, sometimes with laughter, with fondness and respect and awe. He was a unique individual, who left his mark on each of them. I am humbled by the kind, generous, intelligent, expansive people Daniel was surrounded by. This next generation is an amazing bunch! I hope to transcribe from a recording that was made the words of each person who spoke, to share with the world at large, for it was an amazing experience. I felt compelled...ok, a few times...to share some things from my heart, for truly I was moved very deeply by everyone's words, by the *impact* my son had. That we all would have such a profound legacy.

In a nutshell, I wish to convey to anyone reading this a few things:

My deepest gratitude to you for your love of my son and your love and support of our family.

The awareness of that, no matter what you do with your life, no matter what you become, the most important thing, the most lasting, the most impact-ful, will be the one-on-one relationships you have with individual people. Love your fellow man; seek God in all things and in each person, for He is there. And like Daniel, your impact will be far-reaching, for those whom you impact will in turn impact others in the same way. No matter who the next superintendent, or president, or deal-maker is. It is love that abides.

Take the time to tell your loved ones that they are your loved ones. Daniel left behind a message to his family on his phone, in which he said, "In the event that I am unable due to death or serious illness to communicate the following, these are to be my last words:" And then he proceeded to speak to each of us individually, telling us of his love for us, telling us what he had not yet told us before, or telling us one more time what he had told us before, as the case may be. Tell your loved ones that they are your loved ones.

And one last shout-out, to another young man, also named Daniel. This Daniel is also Orthodox. He remembered that his roommate burst into his room to deliver the shocking news: Daniel Holland died. This Daniel said he immediately dropped to his knees and prayed for my son's soul. Thank you, Daniel, for praying as we Orthodox do, for the soul of the newly-departed. Thank you. I am glad you and my son were friends.