

Eric,
May the angels lead you into paradise;
may the martyrs come to welcome you
and take you to the holy city,
the new and eternal Jerusalem.

May the choirs of angels welcome you
and lead you to the bosom of Abraham;
and where Lazarus is poor no longer
may you find eternal rest.

May Jesus Christ, who called you, take you to himself,
he who said, "I am the resurrection and the life.
Whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ,
by your own three days in the tomb,
you hallowed the graves of all who believe in you
and so made the grave a sign of hope
that promises resurrection even as it claims our mortal bodies.

Grant that Eric may sleep here in peace
until you awaken him to glory,
you who are the resurrection and the life.
Then he will see you face to face
and in your light will see light
and know the splendor of God,
for you live and reign for ever and ever.

Amen.

I asked Father Dan to read this to you, Eric. Words are hard to come by at this time, but I wanted you to know how special you are to me and always will be.

My Dearest Eric,

I just wanted you to know what a beautiful son you have been and will continue to be in my heart. You have brought me so much joy. I keep asking myself, "What am I going to do without my Eric?" You could always make me laugh, and you would know what I was going to say before the words came out of my mouth.

Who's going to let me know when we need groceries? You always kept a good eye on the refrigerator. Heaven forbid if we ran out of fruit snacks. You were the one who made the runs for Joe and me when we ran out of Diet Coke or needed an Irish sundae from Ritters.

We really had some fun times together. And there were also the not so fun times when you ended up being grounded. At the time, I was not your favorite person. But you always knew you were loved.

You were also my helper. When the electricity recently went out, you were out in the cold, dark garage—barefooted no less—trying to get the garage door open for me. And thank God you noticed that black mustache I had from the grease in the garage before I left for work! Of course you called for Melissa to see it, so she could have a good laugh, too. But you were kind enough to hold the flashlight for me, so that I could see to wash it off.

Wednesday night I walked by your bedroom and saw that you were doing some intense cleaning. I wondered what was wrong, because you never cleaned your room. I came in, and you were getting bags of clothes together which you wanted to donate to St. Vincent de Paul. We talked about what special plans you had for Lent. You told me that you were going to try to be "more giving, not lie so much, and commit more random acts of kindness." You didn't have a chance to do those things. God called you home.

Eric, I tried to instill in you the qualities and values that would help you grow into the good, strong Christian man I hoped you would become. You were all of those good things and much, much more. You taught me the importance of loving unconditionally, the need to always be kind to others, and the need to not be so quick to judge. You truly had a beautiful life. I will miss you and love you all the days of my life. You will be my "Forever Valentine."

Love, Mom

Homily for the Funeral of Eric Henry

Fr. Daniel Scheidt—St. Joseph's Church, Mishawaka

February 18, 2002

—When those of us who gathered at Mass last Wednesday at Marian High School had ashes placed on our foreheads and heard the words, “Remember, man, that you are dust and to dust you shall return,” we had no idea that we would be here today to return so quickly one whom we loved so dearly back to the earth—and to the Maker of Heaven and earth—from which he came.

—God did not intend for this tragedy to happen; He makes us for long life and is not the source of destruction. God did not make cars to hit trees. And yet, unfathomably, the Lord *allows* this to happen, and we are left to ask: *Why? To what purpose? What good could possibly come of this?* Ultimately the meaning of this event will only be found over time and after many, many years—and of course we shall understand it fully only on the Last Day. But, even now, we are given a hint . . .

—Our hearts are utterly broken, and from them pours forth every feeling imaginable: grief and anger and loneliness and questioning and helplessness and fear and sadness unto numbness. And all of these must continue to flow: They are the *truth*. Indeed the Lord does not stop the psalmist from crying out, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? . . . Why do I go mourning all the day long?” (Ps 22:1; 38:6). Our grief is an expression of deepest love—love that has its source before death and beyond death, love that is stronger than death (Sg 8:6), because love is from *God*.

—And it is *in the very breaking of our hearts* that we see the beginning of the gifts that God wants to give to us, and that Eric wants to give to us. God allows our hearts to be broken so that they can be *opened up* and *made larger* through the breaking. *Eric has expanded our hearts:* Has the Senior class *ever* been closer? Has the family of Marian High School *ever* been more united this year? Have we *ever* thought so clearly and profoundly about our own mortality? Have we *ever* been so focused on what really matters in life and what doesn't? These are all *gifts*. What *enormous* gifts to give to one's friends!

—Eric's death has also taught us another lesson that a thousand hours of classroom instruction could never teach: *This earth is not our final home*, and all of us will leave it—later or sooner—on a day and at an hour that is not ours to know. In the afternoon on the day of Eric's death, his English class took down the mobiles of Dante's *Divine Comedy* that they had made, in which they each had to depict what Heaven was like. Eric had placed pictures of his family and friends in Heaven. Could God *possibly* be less generous in placing Eric where Eric had placed the many he loved? Could God *ever* unfairly deny the child He created and redeemed the joy of preparing our welcome one day? The Lord will *never* be outdone in kindness. Never.

—In pondering the brevity of Eric's life on this earth, it is worth remembering that, from the perspective of eternity, the age we have attained before finally being taken home to the Lord does not matter. Before Him who is the “Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Rev 21:6), and who ultimately grants “*endless* length of days,” the temporal span and worldly accomplishment of *every* human life comes up too short. Whether eighteen or eighty, young or old, all stand before God in need of completion. And the Lord who vows, “I will make all things new” (Rev 21:5), will indeed bring everything—including all of the potential in Eric—to its full stature and proper maturity.

—As for any regrets that we may have—what we should have said but didn't, or did say but shouldn't have—these disappear into nothingness in the light of the one best and final gift we can still give to Eric: the gift of a *changed life*. If Eric's death brings us to our knees, to radical conversion from all that is not important, to repentant confession of all that is keeping us from the Lord, to a transformed life embraced with greater depth and excellence for having known him, that is the ultimate and only gift Eric could now want or need from us: for our purification to be the crowning of his purification. How unfathomably beautiful, for God to reward Eric for the gift of our conversion!

—You see, from now on the only way to stay close to Eric is to stay close to the Lord, because Eric exists now entirely in the Lord's hands. And therefore we can expect that Eric will make his presence felt, not just in memories of the past (the pagans have only memories of the past to rely on), but in the *present*—in ten thousand ways we cannot predict or control. Today's liturgy reminds us that for the Christian faithful who die, “life is changed, not ended.” Eric will continue to make himself known to us, for he remains “*alive in Christ*” (1 Cor 15:22; Col 3:3).

—This is all true because our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ came down from heaven so that the Father might lose *nothing* of what is His. *Nothing*. It will be *raised again* on the Last Day! But for now, Eric has been taken from the arms of one mother, Mary, and placed into the arms of another Mother Mary—the patroness of our school and Our Lady of Sorrows—she who knows most deeply the pain of beholding, and holding, a son who died too soon. But she is alive, and her Son, Jesus, is alive! *And death by a tree is not the end for Eric, precisely because death on a tree was not the end for Christ!* If the tragedy of the Master can be redeemed, so, too, that of the servant. Everything depends upon the Lord Jesus Christ and His Resurrection. We live for Easter.

—Last Ash Wednesday, I don't think we really quite knew what it was to *long* for Easter, to *ache* for Jesus to rise from the dead. Now we know, and we have both the Lord and Eric to thank for it. And we also have the sure faith and certain hope that this congregation of mourners will one day be finally reunited and fully transformed with Eric and all who have died in the Risen Lord into that great and happy throng of saints in Paradise.