

1. Is 65:17-21
2. 1 Cor 15:51-57
3. Jn 14:1-6

**Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB**

1. Charles Dickens opened his book, A Tale of Two Cities, with this famous sentence, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times."

- I think these mixed feelings hit home to all of us today.  
- It was the best of times. While Fr. Paul was alive, it was the best of times. I have received pages of emails expressing gratitude for Fr. Paul, his kindness. and his gentle ways.

- Here is just one example from a handicap friend he went to school with. He wrote: "I want you to know that I have appreciated all the kindness you have shown me. This is one of the reasons that your illness has been especially difficult for me. . . . I know that your faith continues to be a great asset for you in this time." (Br. Michael, St. Vincent, Christmas card)

- Freda and Ardel, his parents, also received an abundance of cards and flowers from friends. We remember the life and ministry of Fr. Paul, as "the best of times."

2. When he got diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's Disease 14 months ago, we felt Fr. Paul was entering "the worst of times." Gradually, his condition weakened and deteriorated and his pain was kept at bay with increasing doses of morphine.

- What amazed all of us was his positive attitude and smile that buoyed up our spirits. Despite his total incapacity at the end, we were able to care for him at the abbey almost until the very last.

3. In his Rule, St. Benedict cautions his monks "to keep the possibility of death every day before their eyes." In his last 14 months, this was the reality Fr. Paul faced courageously.

- St. Benedict said this not to encourage us to live a morbid and sad life. Rather, he reminds us of what goal lies ahead for us, where we

are journeying to. Death can be something positive. St. Benedict writes: "Yearn for eternal life with all the longing of our soul." That's why we "keep the possibility of death every day before their eyes."

- In the words of today's Gospel, St. John tells us that if we believe in God, our hearts should not be troubled. "In my Father's house," he says, "there are many dwelling places. . . And I am going to prepare a place for you."

- That is the faith that sustained Fr. Paul. That is the faith that sustains us. That is the faith that St. Benedict preached. That's what we look forward to. . . the Father's house.

- St. Benedict expressed his faith at the beginning of his Rule, written 1,500 years ago and still meaningful today. Describing the monastic way of life, he writes, "Do not . . . run away from the road that leads to salvation. . . . As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love."

- And when our heart overflows with love, it shows. When our heart overflows with love, people are attracted. When our heart overflows with love, we look forward into the future with hope . . . because eternal life means being with God who is love.

4. The prophet Isaiah, despite the turmoil and troubles of his time, invites us to look beyond the pain and struggles of our day. He says in today's first reading: "Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. . ." And then he has the Lord making this astonishing promise: "I will delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress."

5. Speaking of the journey beyond death, one of Fr. Paul's cousin's emailed me with her description. She wrote:

- "Billions of galaxies. . . . I'm wondering where in the universe Fr. Paul's spirit is exploring now. Energy everywhere and nowhere all at once and not at all..... Bliss."

- Maybe that's the new world, the new Jerusalem that awaits us. It will be a new energy . . . it will be bliss. We are joining a family that is delighted to be there.

6. St. Paul calls this a mystery. And so it is. We can only imagine what the new Jerusalem looks like. We can only rely on our faith, and on Jesus, our pioneer in faith. St. Paul reminds us that we don't die, but we are changed. Jesus has conquered death. Death has been swallowed up in victory, St. Paul tells the Corinthians.

- And that victory over death begins already in this life. As St. Benedict tells his monks: "As we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. . . and of joy This is the beginning of eternal life."

7. In the Old Testament, Abraham is called the Father of Faith. Three families of faith call Abraham their Father: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

- I am always struck how people are described when they die in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 25 we read: "Then Abraham breathed his last . . . and he was gathered to his people."

- At our death, we breathe our last and are gathered to our people. God calls us home. We join our friends and relative. God delights in his family. In God's family, there is no weeping or cries of distress. All our hidden potential here on earth explodes in a new way. Jesus says, "Be not afraid." The worst is over. The best is yet to come.