

Okay -- I have to begin very bluntly – just to get a couple of questions out of the way:

First, does anybody have any tears left? Because just when I think I have shed my last --- I'm overcome with another whole wave.

Second, just how much does God think this family can take?

Theresa's husband.

Brad.

Mary recently in the hospital.

A flooded basement.

Now – Dana's sudden death.

It reminds me of the impassioned cry of St. Theresa of Avila: "God, if this is the way you treat your friends, it's a wonder you have any."

But it will be your faith in God – our faith in God – as well as the love and support of family and friends that will see us through this.

Patty – you and Dana have been so supportive of me since I've come to Holy Family. You have often written in notes and cards how appreciative your family is in having me walking with you at this time in your life and in your faith journey.

As hard as it is for me to say – I'm glad I can be with you today --- to help in whatever way I can in this unexpected detour in life.

And I know I speak especially on behalf of the incredible people you and I get to work with every day on our staff, but also on behalf of the incredible people we serve every day in our parish, that we love you, we support you and will be here for you in whatever way you need us.

John and I often speak of the unique perspective we have every week up here – looking out. And sometimes there is a lot of eye contact with you, Patty – and others – over what is unfolding before us.

Dana used to enjoy that eye contact, too – or would have to jab you to call your attention to it.

From my perspective last night and here today – I see hundreds of people supportive of you, and Kelly and Dustin. And in the days to come -- sometimes it is better for us if you mention very specific ways that we can help you. Otherwise it's not that we don't care – it's just that we often times don't know what to say or do.

So help us out in that regard.

Kelly and Dustin – the other day you were both talking about the ways you see traits of your father in one another: Kelly has Dad's cheeks and Dustin has Dad's competitive spirit.

Continue to look for those ways that your Dad lives on in each of you – and may you come to appreciate them and treasure them more and more.

Your mother loves you very much and as she told you the other night – without a little help from Dana – she would not have you by her side.

I did not always get along with my father, but I could never imagine being able to get through some of the major events of my life without him. Unfortunately, that will have to be your experience.

Mom will be there. Aunts and uncles, grandparents and friends will be there, but your Dad's presence and his smile will always be missing.

That will be the cross you will bear for the rest of your lives – just don't think you have to bear it alone.

To Dana's mom and dad –

To Dana sisters –

To all Dana's family and friends –

What we do here today is not easy, but it is something we have to do. Grief is the price we pay for love. And today we have great grief because we had great love for Dana.

Almost 2 weeks ago, our staff gathered with leaders in the parish for what we have come to call a parish summit. Our facilitator for the morning asked us to begin by making a name card for ourselves. On it we were asked to put our first name preceded by a descriptive adjective of ourselves that started with the same letter as our name.

So we had Persistent Peggy,

Methodical Matthew, and Passionate Patty.

Dana was not at this meeting – so today I offer you a few descriptive adjectives on his behalf.

There is, of course, DEVOTED Dana:

Descriptive of his relationship with you, Patty, and with Kelly and Dustin.

Dana was a devoted husband, father, son, brother, son-in-law-- a devoted uncle – especially to you Brook.

Dana was a devoted friend, coach, employee and parishioner.

With Dana on our side, so many of us were able to achieve more than we thought was possible. And that was due to another adjective descriptive of Dana:

DETERMINED! Now one side of this determination some would choose to call *stubbornness*. For once Dana made up his mind—that was it. And if you did not agree with him – then he could pout for days.

But there was also a very positive side to this determination – knowing that Dana would be the first to give you a pat on the back. The first to say it could be done when everyone else said it could not. The first to say you did well, but you could do better. The first to say never give up on your dreams or never give up on yourself.

Dana’s trait of determination would explain why “Rudy,” the young man who never gave up on his dream of playing football for Notre Damem was a movie he watched over and over again.

“You can do it.” was Dana’s consistent mantra to us all – which is what you kept telling him Sunday night in that E.R., Patty. As the doctors continued pushing more and more meds into him and were doing all they could for him – you kept saying, “Come on Dana, you can do it. Don’t give up.”

But that was just not meant to be.

There was DECEPTIVE Dana – which was nothing intentional on his part – as was the case with Patty and her co-workers when it came to a certain party several weeks ago!

No, Dana's deception was nothing intentional. It's just when you saw this great big guy – you naturally thought you were encountering a great big grumbly bear. But that was just not the case. Dana was one of the gentlest people I have ever met. He was a teddy bear at best – a cream puff – according to his own mother.

Dana's emotions were very close to the surface and it did not take much to set them off – especially to open the well of tears.

There was DEVILISH Dana – who always enjoyed a little mischief.

DEVOUT Dana who once his father-in-law appeared to him in a dream – embraced the Catholic faith tenaciously – and encouraged others to do the same as witnessed by his ministry in Confirmation, NCYC and RCIA.

But I think most of all – at least for me -- there was DELIGHTFUL Dana. You just could not help but like being around Dana. There was a positive energy surrounding him that drew people close to him: young and old, new friends and old ones, even complete strangers.

Dana made us laugh. He made us feel good about ourselves and he helped us to enjoy life.

So now this devoted, determined, deceptive, devilish, devout and delightful man has suddenly been taken from us. So what, if anything, can we learn from this experience?

I think at least two things that are closely related:

First, none of us has the guarantee of tomorrow, so we always need to keep things in perspective. Those things we expend our time and energy on. The things we all think are important. The things we argue and fight about are really

nothing compared to the gift of life that can be so quickly taken away from each one of us.

So we need to take care of ourselves **and** our relationships. We need to value every day and live life to the fullest.

We have to have a passion about who we are and what we are doing -- and if we don't, then we have to do something about that -- because life is too darned short.

And second, related to the first, we should not leave things unsaid in our relationships. "I love you. I am glad you are in my life. You are so special to me. I'm sorry and I forgive you" are all things we never tire of hearing from others, but words we so often ration in our daily lives. Say the things that need to be said -- even if they are painful -- and life will be lived to its fullest. And God's joy will be in us and our joy will be complete.

Patty, I cannot end without using a few words of wisdom from the author we both enjoy -- Max Lucado.

Lucado writes in his book, Grace for the Moment:

If you will celebrate a marriage anniversary alone this year -- God is speaking to you.

If your child made it to heaven before making it to kindergarten -- God is speaking to you.

If your dreams were buried as they lowered the casket into the ground -- God is speaking to you.

God speaks to all of us who have stood or will stand in the soft dirt near an open grave. And to us God speaks these confident words:

“If, then, we have died with Christ – we believe that we shall also live with Christ. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.” (Romans 6:8)

Because Dana died with Christ death no longer has power over him and we believe that Dana is now living with Christ.

He now stands in the kingdom of heaven. And as Dana is gazing around, he no doubt is saying to himself:

“This is the most beautiful sight these eyes have ever seen.”

That’s assuming, of course, you can get into heaven wearing a pair of blue jeans – but not just any pair of jeans – but a pair with a nice imprint of a Skoal can on the back pocket.

Grant eternal rest to Dana, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon him.

AMEN!