

In Memoriam: Dee Penza

March 13, 1958 – December 28, 2019



On behalf of the community of St. Perpetua and all of us who have gathered in prayer, I want to offer you Vince our deepest sympathy on the loss of your wife and companion for twenty-eight years. Your and Dee's mutual interest in science and medicine was a wonderful alignment that must have added significantly to your relationship. I've appreciated your clinical expertise as my optometrist for two decades. Your chosen profession and your desire to help people have the best vision possible is admirable, but you would be the first to acknowledge that Dee's presence and impact on your life helped you to see with the eyes of the heart. The often-quoted words from Saint-Exupéry's The Little Prince says it best: *And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one*

can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

Bella, the visual image that you gave us last night at the vigil service was a testimony to the wonderful relationship you had with your Mom when you said: *She would run into my room and jump on my bed and say: "Let's talk."* Brad, you said it so well at the end of your testimony when you gave thanks to Dee for being your Mom and your Friend. Many sons and daughters of any age would be envious of the wonderful relationship you both had with your Mom – open and trusting, fun and inspiring. We pray that her spirit will always be with you as companion and guide, and that the best qualities of her life will find expression through you.

To all of Dee's thirteen siblings – Olivia, Michael, Steven, Gary, Ralph, Elena, Martin, Rita, Daniel, David, John, Richard and Robert – losing the first of your clan, of your Gutierrez team, cannot be easy. You can only pray that she gives a favorable report to your parents, Eufelia and Leonardo, as they welcome her into the Kingdom. You and your extended families now have a heavenly cheerleader interceding for you and watching over you.



This morning our faith calls each of us to a different kind of vision. In his letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul writes:

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which God has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

(Ephesians 1:18-19)

It's not easy to have this kind of clear vision when our eyes are clouded by tears. To profess as we do in the Apostle's Creed our belief in "the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting" requires a strength and a conviction that's often lacking when grief weighs heavily upon us. It's not only our confrontation with physical death that tests us. So often the little "dyings" of everyday living dull our spirits and challenge our faith – when our ego is deflated by someone's ill-spoken remark, when plans we carefully made go awry, when our work is unsatisfying or unsuccessful, when people around us just don't seem to understand... These too are moments and experiences that call for courage and reaching deep down into the core of our being – that place where the Spirit of the living God abides.



How often Dee must have had to dip into that well during these years in her struggle with cancer. I asked her faithful support network of women to share their insights with me. Her friend

Mary said: *She kept fighting with dignity, smiles and zero self-pity.* Laurie told me that when their group of women friends rallied around Dee *"turns out that Dee was the trouper – the supporter. We'd typically start the evening asking about her latest test and treatment plan and how she and the family were doing. She would give us a brief update and then move on to each of us and our families. Determination, optimism, family, friends and faith were her foundation stones – that's how her friend Kim captured Dee's approach to life and how she confronted her illness.* Laura said that *"with Dee, I never saw the "Why me?" just the "How to?" – how to continue to be there for the people I love.*

A few years ago, I came across a card with the heading: "What Cancer Can't Do." It read:

*Cancer is so limited...
It cannot cripple love.
It cannot shatter hope.
It cannot corrode faith.
It cannot destroy peace.
It cannot kill friendships.
It cannot suppress memories.
It cannot silence courage.
It cannot invade the soul.
It cannot steal eternal life.
It cannot conquer the Spirit.*

Those of you among Dee's family and friends witnessed firsthand the truth of this litany because you saw it validated in her own struggle with cancer. But the cross of Christ comes to each of us in many different ways, usually not so obvious as the ravages of cancer. Jesus' invitation to "take up your cross and follow" him is a daily beckoning. By our union with Christ, our living in the Spirit, our trust in God's providential care we

have strength for any and all the trials we face. Knowing that God has promised us the gift of eternal life, we can hear Jesus' words and believe in them: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.*

At the end of November on a visit with Dee, she wanted me to read a poem she loved by E.E. Cummings. I was thrilled because Cummings is one of my favorite poets. The poem Dee loved was one I hadn't heard before. It's entitled: "i carry your heart with me" and it became popular through its use in a 2005 comedy-drama movie called "In Her Shoes." The poem is printed on the back of the funeral program for you. It seemed that Dee wanted it to be a part of the events that marked her passing from this life to God's eternal life. Just as Jesus at the Last Supper with his disciples left them a legacy in the Eucharist – the bread and wine that he shared with them, and the gift of peace which Jesus bequeathed to them, perhaps this poem was the message Dee wanted to leave with all of you, her loved ones, and those of you who have come today to be with them and support them:

*i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart)
i am never without it (anywhere i go you
go, my dear; and whatever is done by
only me is your doing, my darling)

i fear no fate (for you are my fate, my
sweet)
i want no world (for beautiful you are
my world, my true)*

*and it's you are whatever a moon has
always meant and whatever a sun will
always sing is you here is the deepest
secret nobody knows (here is the root of
the root
and the bud of the bud and the sky of
the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can
hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the
stars apart
i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)*



(i carry it in my heart)
- e e cummings

In her living and her dying Dee has shown you not only what cancer cannot do, but more wonderfully, what love can do. May Dee now dwell in the eternal love of our God who is Love.

John Kasper, OSFS