



Ephraim Fred Ortwein

February 26, 2021 - February 26, 2021

Eulogy for Ephraim Fred Ortwein

What are we to make of this? How are we to understand this? How are we to cope with this, this death, this tragedy, the loss of this child, an innocent infant, little Ephraim Fred? How are we to understand and discern the hand of God here?

All of those are difficult questions, none of them with easy answers or perhaps even answers at all. Sometimes we trick ourselves to make sense of things when it would truly be better to simply say, "I don't know." That is a scary place to be and a scary thing to admit, but if I am being honest, I know that is precisely where I am. I have heard questions along these lines from many of you, questions that, if I am being honest, I myself have.

Instead of using this as an opportunity to provide answers for these questions, I would like to rely on the prayers of the Church. Likely, the death of Ephraim Fred will bring about questions that we will struggle to answer for literally many years to come. Truly, that is okay and to be expected. At various moments of our lives, especially for his parents, Mark and Sarah, and his siblings, Ava, Ruby, Dashiell and Soren, there will be questions. That is okay. Likely, this moment will be one that will be remembered as a turning point and a reference point for many things to come. Lord willing, there will be a time for those questions to be answered, as God is able, or as we are able to see it. But for now, we have this service, these prayers, and one another. In the Orthodox tradition how we pray is how we believe. The way we come together as a community to pray always reflects the Truth of the Gospel, the Good news of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

With that said, while I am completely unable to answer many of the questions that we all are asking, I am able, because of the prayers that we together are praying, I am able to say some things with absolute and complete certainty. And Lord willing, that is enough for today. Enough for us to grieve, enough for us to hope and enough for us to see Christ, even if it just in a shadow for today.

The first thing that I can say with utmost certainty is that this death, and truly all death is a

grave and unbelievable tragedy. There is nothing in our faith or in this service that says that we should not be weeping and that we should put on a strong face and say that death is not tragic. We were not created for death! We were created for life. Even Christ recognized death as what it was when he stood in front of the tomb of his friend Lazarus and groaned in His Spirit and wept. Death is the enemy, as St. Paul tells us.

In the prayers of the Church, we are affirmed in our grief and truly given the proper permission to respond in the way that we all have and truly all should, with grief, with sorrow, with groaning in our spirit. Here, perhaps more than at other times, because the loss of an infant brings about a profound grief and sorrow. We just prayed together these words, speaking to Ephraim, who we have lost, "Thy parting has truly become a cause of sorrow and a constant tearful memorial. For before tasting the beautiful things of this life, you have departed the earth and the bosom of your parents." And in speaking about the torment of a mother and a father the Church prays, "No one suffers more than a mother; no one is more pained than a father..." Our gut reaction to be torn to pieces in facing this death is the exact right one.

Added to that, more than anything, at this moment, we desire for Ephraim to be here with us. While that desire is real, may we take a bit of comfort in another thing that we can say with utmost certainty based on the prayers that we have prayed together. While desiring Ephraim Fred to be here with us we know where he truly resides this day, in the bosom of Abraham. This phrase, the bosom of Abraham, is not used very often in the Church. Truly only here in the funeral service. We take this phrase from the parable that our Lord told about the rich man and Lazarus. You likely remember that Lazarus lived at the gate of a rich man who ignored him. When they both died, the rich man suffered in Hades and Lazarus on the other hand, lived and dwelt comforted in the bosom of Abraham. Over and over again in the hymns and prayers that we have heard and prayed it makes clear that this is the place where Ephraim Fred and all of the righteous departed dwell. But the imagery is important. Especially for the death of a child. Instead of hearing about a generic heaven that perhaps we cannot imagine, we are instead given the concrete image of the bosom of Abraham. For me, this brings up images of security, comfort and rest. To reside in the bosom, in the arms of an experienced elder who truly only imagines giving comfort and providing for the needs of his kin now brought to his residence. That is the image that we are left with in this service. Ephraim resides with the righteous, he is comforted, safe and secure, engulfed in the arms of a loving Master.

And that is the next thing that I can offer with certainty, and would like to offer with certainty for each of us. We may question it's certainty when we stand and face the reality of the death of a child that was taken from us far too early, but we need to hear and we

need to remember that we can say with absolute certainty that God loves Ephraim and God loves each one of us, far more than we can fathom. If that were not true, we would not even need to be here; death would simply be the end and over time we would all be forgotten. But that is not the case! Even for someone like Ephraim who never drew a breath in this world, we pray for his memory to be eternal. His life is not one that is wasted. Sarah especially, but the entire family will have memories of experiences with Ephraim, even if only in the womb, that precious life was part of their family. They and all of us will grieve the lack of future memories and experiences we longed to have with him, but we will remember this day. This day, that Ephraim gave us the opportunity to be reminded of the fundamental Truths of our life; that this world can be a painful place and that death exists and that we cannot conquer it on our own, because it is the last great enemy. But knowing that, we are reminded of the great love of God who in His willingness to become a little Child Himself, defeated, destroyed and annihilated that enemy, and opened the gates of paradise to this child and to all of us. And we cannot forget this day because the last thing that I can say with utmost certainty is that Ephraim Fred himself encourages us to pray these prayers and to do something, to become like him. We are called to become like Ephraim Fred, the innocent child. As we were reminded in the Gospel reading we just heard, “to children belongs the kingdom of God.” We are called to be like the little Children and we have one of pure innocence before us as the model.

Who can be saved? The apostles asked this very good question. And in the words of the service that we are praying, in a great mystery, Ephraim Fred, the newly departed child of God offers us the answer, “Weep not for me, for I have in no wise become lamentable. Weep rather for yourselves who are always sinning!” How do we become children who are able to inherit the Kingdom of God and repose in the bosom of Abraham? We repent. Ephraim has provided for us the opportunity to remember that while death is a terrible tragedy, the bosom of Abraham, the place of comfort, the place of security, the place of safety and rest truly exists because our God loves us with a love that we cannot imagine. The challenge for us, those of us given the life that we have been given, is to devote it to knowing God, the God who welcomed Ephraim Fred into His bosom and the God who desires to do nothing less for each of us. Over the days, weeks, months and years ahead, the questions will keep coming. That’s okay. Ask them to one another, don’t hold them in. Over the days, weeks, months and years ahead grief will cover our hearts, and that’s okay. Weep with and comfort one another. And may each time the questions come and the grief comes, may each time be an opportunity to remember Ephraim who reminds us of death and it’s destruction by Christ, reminds us of the reality of rest available in the bosom of Abraham, and reminds us of the great Love of God. Perhaps in those remembrances over time, we will have some of the answers that we crave, or perhaps in those remembrances, we will realize that we won’t need answers, only God.

I'll finish with once again allowing the certainties of the service that we are praying speak to us. And in that great mystery of our prayers, I will allow the newly departed Ephraim Fred the opportunity to share his new-found wisdom, wisdom that he has gained by residing in the presence of the loving God in the bosom of Abraham.

O God, my God, who has summoned me: be the consolation of my family now, for great weeping has befallen them. For all have fixed their gaze on me. But do thou, who wast born of a Virgin Mother, refresh the womb of my mother, and bedew the heart of my father with this song: Alleluia.

May this prayer, and all of the prayers that Ephraim Fred now offers on behalf of his family, most especially, but also those prayers that he offers for all of us who weep and mourn his repose, may those prayers of Ephraim's be answered by our Good and Loving God. And may the memory of the newly departed, Ephraim Fred, be eternal.

Cemetery

Rose Hill Cemetery

Sardis, MS,

Events

MAR 5 Funeral Service 02:00PM

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St. John Orthodox Church

1663 Tutwiler, Memphis, TN, US, 38107

Comments



“ Medium Dish Garden was purchased for the family of Ephraim Fred Ortwein.



March 04, 2021 at 11:49 AM