

Good evening (morning). I'm Mara Ambrose and Fr. Keith asked me to speak about "glimmers of grace" in difficult times. From the handout in last week's bulletin, grace was defined in part as the divine influence in our lives which exists to regenerate, sanctify and strengthen.

As some of you may know, we lost our 15 year old granddaughter Xia last year to a malignant brain tumor. I remember the very beginning of her journey when my daughter and I sat in a small consulting room at Hopkins with several doctors who gave us Xia's diagnosis and prognosis. It was bleak. She had the worst kind of tumor with a less than a 1% chance of survival. As I listened to the doctors and looked at my daughter, I struggled to breathe. I couldn't even pray at that moment. When I didn't think I could take another breath, I felt a blanket of peace cover me. It was certainly divine influence because that kind of peace is not in my nature. I knew that God was in that room with us. This peace was more than just a glimmer of grace. It was a precious gift that enabled me to leave that room, not in the darkness of despair about the probability but in the light of openness to God's possibilities. It was a transformational moment and the peace never left me.

God's graces continued to glimmer on Xia and on us during her almost four year journey:

- Shortly after her diagnosis, a beautiful rainbow after Mass affirmed God's presence with us and was a sign of hope that no matter what the outcome for Xia, she was in good hands and all would be well for her.
- Xia's megawatt smile that by God's grace rarely left her, ministered to so many who knew and loved her.
- This amazing parish of caring friends who prepared meals, were generous with their hugs and prayers and manifested their concern and love in so many ways.
- At one point, I wondered and worried if Xia, as a typical teenager, really had faith and believed what she had been taught. In a store one day, she picked out a ring in the shape of the infinity symbol. When I asked her why that particular one, she said it reminded her that she would spend eternity in heaven. God's grace had touched her!

- In Xia's last weeks she was bed-ridden and lethargic with little ability to communicate. Nevertheless, on the day of Confirmation, by the grace of God, Xia rallied and was able to come to church and be actively present at the moment of her confirmation. God's grace had touched her!

I heard in a workshop on prayer that we must go beyond the "why" of a difficult situation and simply ask God to open our eyes and hearts to what he wants us to see and to know.

God's grace did give me different eyes, a different heart and new understanding. It illuminated for me a different vision of life and of death.

God's grace isn't a magic charm. It didn't take away the pain of separation or the profound sense of loss ... but it did give us comfort and strength and God's grace transformed the unthinkable into glimmers of light, of hope and of beautiful moments that I'll carry with me forever.

God's gift of peace enabled me to be fully present with Xia as she lived her illness with courage and grace.

And most of all, God's grace taught me to trust in Him more profoundly than I had thought possible. He didn't answer MY prayer for Xia's healing ... but he healed Xia nevertheless by his great gift of salvation. Only by God's grace do I know beyond any doubt that I still have all of my grandchildren.

For all these glimmers of grace and for Xia's eternal life, I said at her funeral and I continue to say every day –

Thanks be to God ... Alleluia!