

Alexis Gabriel Lebedeff was a character from birth to death. A character defined as someone who exhibits honesty, integrity and ethical behavior in what is said and more importantly in what is done.

As a teacher in the Crawfordsville school system for nearly 30 years, the stories I've heard of him during that tenure are of someone who was quite clear in what he expected of students. He expected students to be present and to be prepared. He was not one that permitted slacking off. Definitely not the teacher or class you took if you were merely marking time or looking for an easy grade! Education was too important to Alex to permit less than your full effort.

In that sense, Alex might be likened to the prophet Isaiah that we heard about a few minutes ago. "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me" (Is. 61:1). Alex believed he had a calling as a teacher. He worked for a while in business with Swift & Company following his own education, but left because he felt this pull to be in the classroom. And there he flourished for many years.

Alex's faith was important to him. He told the story of his father's urging him to make going to church – to living his faith - an important part of his life. Alex told of his time in Korea when he was in the Army of missing the liturgy and of his gratefulness for the Roman Catholic priest who welcomed Alex, even though Alex was not Roman Catholic. That hunger for a community of faith and the opportunity to worship stayed with Alex through the end of his life. Alex loved the liturgy of the church: the way we worship together; the way the service flows from gathering together, to hearing the Word of God, to sharing communion: the bread and wine representing Christ's sacrifice for us. Alex found both solace and strength in the liturgy of our church.

While he was able, Alex was a reader on Sunday mornings. He would come to the church office early during the week to pick up the lessons he was going to read. Then he would take them home to Ann, who would have him practice and practice until Alex was able to read the lessons with vim and verve. Alex was always clear that he could minister in this way because Ann supported him.

One of the ways in which Alex lived his faith was when he took communion to those not able to attend church. Alex and his friend Vern Easterling were a team. As Lay Eucharistic Visitors they were charged with going from the Sunday service here at St. John's to visit the homebound or those in care facilities. They took the consecrated bread and wine and the Word of God out into the community so that the bonds of friendship and the love of God were strengthened. They helped ensure that those they visited knew they were still part of the body of Christ.

In the last couple of years, after Alex and Ann had moved to Wellbrooke, other Lay Eucharist Visitors took the bread and wine to Alex and Ann. Alex wanted to read the lessons every time we visited. He wanted to be kept in the loop. He still wanted to be part of the service not simply a bystander. Alex read the bulletin and the newsletter from cover to cover. And, with eagle eyes, he noticed if there was a typo – but kindly pointed out the error so I could make sure that didn't happen again!

Perhaps one reason Alex chose the Gospel reading that he did for this service is that Jesus assures us that no matter our circumstances at our death, God has a place reserved for us when God calls us home. “Do not let your hearts be troubled” Jesus tells us. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14: 1, 3). Although we do not know the particulars of what our life with God will be like when it is our time to be reunited with God, we can rest assured that there is room at the inn- unlike Joseph, Mary and the Christ Child. There is room for all of us; no need to worry about whether God loves us.

The partnership of Alex and Ann was something to see. Alex was most vocal about how he and Ann met, their courtship, and how he depended upon her to keep him going and to keep him on the straight and narrow path. In these last couple of years, that partnership shifted a bit as Ann became frailer. Alex became very protective of her. He was not afraid to call out for help from staff at Wellbrooke or the hospital if he felt something wasn't quite as he thought it should be.

This year was tough. Alex had been in the hospital 8 times between Christmas and when he died. It was clear that he was on a journey that would end with his death. A couple of times we thought it was the end- even the doctors felt that Alex would not pull through. But he surprised us and was able to go back to Wellbrooke for a bit more. Each time, though, it was clear that his body was getting weaker and less able to bounce back. His hearing continued to decline and it became even more difficult to talk with him. At one point, we were writing with paper and pen on a tablet because he simply couldn't hear us. Even so, when you visited, you still saw the bright eyes and the smile and the hand that reached out. Alex's character came through.

We will gather after this service in Whitlock Hall so that you can greet the family and can share your memories of Alex. I hope you will take the opportunity to do that. We live on with the Lord after we die – of that Jesus assured us in the Gospel we read earlier. We also live on through the memories we share. “Do you remember when....” Both are important to us, and especially to us as people of faith. The communion of saints is a way we talk about those who have gone before us to be with the Lord. It is also a way to remind us that we are each a saint, defined as someone who believes in God and who strives to live a life of character: true to the values that Jesus set before us. And now, although we will not see him again in physical form, we can rejoice that Alex has joined that great cloud of witnesses and has eternal life with God. Amen. Alleluia!