

A Future of Union

BY MARY BETH NEWKUMET

When the Y2K countdown was in full swing, many of us were thinking about the future. How could we not? The media was filled with stories of scientific advances, technological wonders and fabulous scenarios about where our art, literature and social conventions were headed in the years to come. The retail and marketing communities geared up, too, with products, gadgets, clothing, books and special offers to help us live our future well.

In the midst of millennium excitement, it was exhilarating to anticipate the celebration of a hopeful world. But it was also important to recognize that many of the future scenarios offered nothing more than a fearful isolation.

A FUTURE ALONE

In the new millennium, the forecasters promised, each of us would have more control over the future. Each of us would stand at the heart of the plan. Here was the fundamental problem with this message: if each of us stands at the heart of his or her own plan, then each of us is standing there *alone*. If our future is shaped—as we are told—by self-reliance, self-control and really careful personal planning, then the future of others often moves forward in tandem, but separate. Every-man-for-himself, then, becomes the future.

This is a message that has already wounded many people in the world, especially now that the terrible events of 9/11 have shown that a future self-determined by even a small group of people can be a very frightening future indeed. In fact, the universal challenges we face in this new century are the direct result of the triumph of the individual who determines his or her own way. Yet even secular commentators have begun to observe that when



people go off on their own, untangling themselves from the bonds of family, friends, community and earth, they grow more edgy, uncertain and dissatisfied.

A SOCIETY OF SEPARATION AND FEAR

“One individual represents no fecundity, no continuity and no harmony,” observes writer Wendell Berry. Yet, secular society continues to urge us to act as individuals and pursue our own destinies *even when we live with others*.

This separation profoundly affects our future. In our homes, many of us are no longer living *together*. Instead, we have become individuals who dwell under the same roof, running off in a hundred

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Mary, the first Steward of Christ

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different directions to activities that are presented as a must. On the job, we are asked to spend hours away from our loved ones, often to produce work that is disconnected from their common good. If we are single, society urges us to live autonomously, removed from the community in which we were formed. When we seek companionship, we are told to pursue sexual union (to ensure compatibility) in place of the deeper interior union we crave. In the community, we often co-exist with our neighbors, trying to be mutually tolerant of people we don't even know. In the global village, we are passive to policies that make sense for us. But we do not take time to explore whether they are damaging to other, more vulnerable peoples.

This practice of separation continues to shape the way many of us perceive the future. The present is now, we have been persuaded, but the future—while full of promising possibilities—is still the great, ominous unknown. And so we live in fear.

While Y2K fears expressed a worry that our computers would crash society as we knew it, the world's millennium anxieties reflected the far more primal fear that we were walking vulnerable and alone into an uncertain future. Today, we still fear our machines; we fear the forces of nature; we fear an economy that no longer seems under anyone's control. The stories of the "big one"—whether it be terrorist attacks, bombs, earthquakes, hurricanes or economic crashes—still leave us uneasy. But it's the personal fears that scare us the most: sickness, sorrow, tragedy, death. A future alone.

HE UNITES THOSE SEPARATED

Into this society of separation and fear, believers can never stop presenting the living presence of Jesus Christ, the only One who can bind up, reconcile, reunite and marry hearts that are lonely and anxious. Because we were created to live in intimate union with him—and the others he has put in our lives—the heart of each human person feels deeply troubled if it is lurching toward the future in every-man-for-himself mode.

“Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your lifespan?” asks Jesus of Nazareth. “Do not be afraid any longer, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom” (Lk 12:25,32). This is the counter-cultural message of the Catholic Church. Sadly, too many people see a life with Christ in his Church as irrelevant rather than a calm for their anxieties and fears. The believer who walks with Christ is peaceful about the future because he recognizes that his destiny is determined by the One from whom he cannot be separated. He has already begun to live his eternal life—his future—here and now.

How can this be? The very first words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church repeat the words of the Gospel of John: “this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn 17:3). This is the most dramatic truth available to each human person: through Christ, we can move forward without fear of destruction, personal catastrophe or even death. *Because of this union, our future is not only deeply satisfying, but also secure.*

UNION MAKES OUR FUTURE NEW

But what of the future for those who do not believe this? At times, the problems seem too big, the separations too deep. Yet, Christ is our hope. A heart united with him can bring a joy and a newness into the world that can change not only the present, but also the course of the future. This is the good news the earliest Christians brought to the fearful people they encountered. “Whoever is in Christ is a

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Life After Sunday

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The Mass Secures Our Future

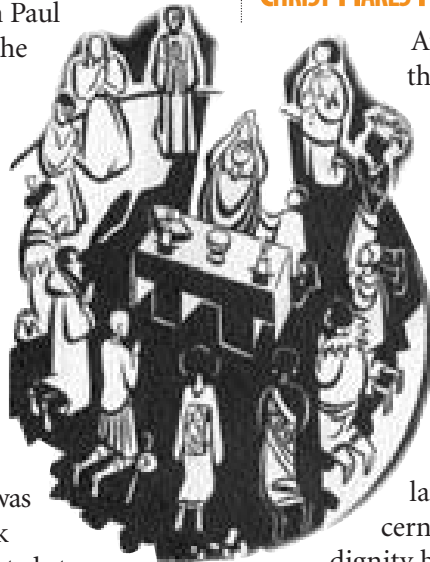
Sunday is the day where the present and future meet. “St. Basil explains that Sunday symbolizes that truly singular day which will follow the present time, the day without end which will know neither evening nor morning, the imperishable age which will never grow old,” says Pope John Paul II. “Sunday is the ceaseless foretelling of life without end, which renews the hope of Christians and encourages them on their way” (Dies Domini).

Pastor St. John Vianney was gloriously frank when he presented eternal life to his own parishioners: “We appear upon this earth, we disappear, and we return no more. Our poor body, that we take such care of, goes away to dust, and our soul, all trembling, goes to appear before the good God....See my children, to die well we must live well.” On Sunday, we “live well” by beginning to live eternal life here and now. But how?

During the Mass, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the visible sign of our life in eternal communion with the Trinity and each other. Here in the Eucharist, the Father — through the Spirit — pours Christ into our hearts. This life is our destiny for all of eterni-

ty. With complete humility, Christ embraces our anxious humanity and transforms our deepest fears. He offers himself as the perfect sacrifice, experiencing our complete vulnerability as we look to our future.

CHRIST MAKES HIMSELF VULNERABLE



At Communion, in the form of simple bread, Jesus makes himself the most vulnerable as he gives himself away to us here in the present. Through the sacrifice of the Mass, he seeks to embrace our heartaches, tribulations and concerns, and lifts us to a dignity beyond compare.

Yet how many of us receive him well with ready souls and open hearts on Sunday? “Beneath the accidents of bread, he is accessible,” said St. Teresa of Avila. “If, while Jesus lived in the world, mere touch of his garments healed the sick, who can doubt that when he is dwelling in the very center of our being he will work wonders of healing in us if we have a living faith in him?”

Christ’s utter humility in the common bread of the Eucharist shows us our stance for the future: a complete dependence on the love and generosity of the Father. The Eucharist sustains our union, confirms this dependence and becomes our eternal hope. “This is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die” (John 6:50) says Jesus of Nazareth. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:51). ❖

Future Feasts

In the liturgical calendar, the Church calls our attention to the future with the celebration of the Feasts of All Saints (Nov. 1) and All Souls (Nov. 2). Try not to let the ghosts and goblins of “All Hallows Evening” distract you from a true celebration of the truths of these great feasts. The saints are available as our advocates and companions as we walk our life with Christ on earth. They exist; they can help! Celebrate their feast with great fanfare and pray to all your family patrons. On the Feast of All Souls, remember that the souls who have gone before us can not pray for themselves, but they can pray for us. They need our prayers, works and offerings to help them reach the fullness of life with the Holy Trinity. Our love and care for these neighbors does not stop with their death. This is why the Church continues to pray for all the souls during the canon of the Mass every day all over the world. ❖

Past Relatives Who Live In Your Future

BY JOHN M. CAPOBIANCO

The sudden death of a family member or loved one seems so tragically final. It brings the reality of our precarious frailty into sharp uncomfortable focus. In the weeks after death, the sense of loss is so overwhelming, one almost instinctively clings to the past. Favorite moments together flood the mind. A precious gift, a shared momento, a piece of clothing, an honored accomplishment, a simple photograph or shaky home video images become treasured icons of a lost presence locked in memory. At best, good memories ease our loneliness and still our broken heart. At worst, bad memories – silly arguments, harsh responses and missed opportunities – haunt our soul. In reality, clinging to the past can only bring us so far when confronting the hollow void left by the loss of a loved one. Thankfully, faith in Jesus Christ transforms the death of a loved one into an event pointing toward the future not merely grasping at the past.



IS DEATH JUST A FUTURE LOST?

The first time I experienced this in my home was with the sudden death of my father from an auto accident. I had just started this communications business for Catholic organizations earlier that same year. While I was still in graduate school, my father encouraged me to work out of our

home, with his blessing. Yet he never attempted to look at the substance of my work too closely.

He hardly had time to explore what I was doing given his own work schedule. He seemed content to provide a good opportunity to get me started. In fact, the first time he asked to read something I had written, was nine months after I started the company. I remember, it was a Sunday morning. He walked in my room and tossed a booklet I had given him to read on my bed. Smiling with a look of subtle Italian pride, he asked playfully, “You wrote that?” I knew we had made a new connection. I thought, from then on, our future together would be closer.

That, however, was the morning of his fatal accident. The next time I saw him, he was attached to intensive care life support with massive head trauma. It was clear he wouldn’t make it. That week my mind was numb. The mystery of my father and the mystery of death smacked me clean in the face. I was too stunned to recall wonderful past events or even worry about the future. Yet, I was confounded by the timing of his newfound curiosity. Why on that morning did he seek me out? Why did God take him on that day? Did my father grasp any possibility of what was turning out to be my life’s work? Was it just the cruel tease of a future lost?

A NEW FAMILY ASSET IN CHRIST

Yet, I know eternal life in Christ is more than a tease. A close priest friend had a knack for getting to the heart of these disquieting mystical questions. “Your father knows you now in death, better than he ever could in this life,” he said. “If he is with Christ, he knows your future. He knows what eternal life is all about. Pray for him but also put him to work. Ask him to help you and your family. But you have to move quickly before he goes off exploring the universe!” St. Therese of the Little Flower claimed she would spend her heaven spreading love for Christ on earth. After her death, she became the Patron of

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Praying to the Family

In his beautiful book, *Maurice and Therese: The Story of a Love*, Bishop Patrick Ahern recounts that St. Therese of Lisieux “was the youngest of nine children, seven girls and two boys. Her parents had always wanted a son who would enter the priesthood and serve the Church as a missionary, but both boys and two of the girls died in their infancy, long before Therese was born. They were far from forgotten. The family honored their memory and often turned to them in prayer.”

During November, the Month of All Souls, plan a family visit to the cemetery to pray at the graves of relatives and friends. Through prayer and remembrance, children can become more comfortable with death as they grow to experience it not as the end, but the beginning of life together in eternity. ❖

Who Will Love You in the Future?

We recently had a glorious, insane family experience. My husband's brother was married one Saturday in Pennsylvania; my brother was married the following Saturday in Connecticut. Two big weddings within a week on each side of the family was a wonderful reminder of the gift of belonging to a lot of people.

Since Chris and I both come from big extended families, it was great to watch grandparents swirling around with their grandchildren, first cousins dancing with second cousins and aunts and uncles still holding each other cheek to cheek after all these years. This outpouring of love and affection for each other transcends the misunderstandings, spats and personality conflicts that afflict all families — even ours. But no matter what the future holds, we will eternally have each other.

BELONGING TO MANY PEOPLE

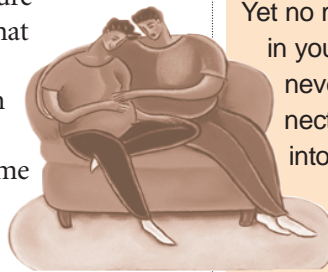
A recent report by the U.S. Census Bureau projects that a third of the couples starting families in America today will only have one child by choice. Many people have bought into the cultural proposal that it is more responsible for the future of the world to have as few children as possible. When I think of our recent family weddings, this trend

makes me sad since it is a decision of the present that blights the future.

How many family members will my own great-grandchildren have? Will they ever have the experience of belonging to a lot of people, I wonder, or will their weddings, holidays, funerals and every day activities be sparsely attended?

A future of very few relatives is a more lonely future — especially when that few is by choice. When the Church asks couples to generously welcome children, she is not being irresponsible. Rather, she knows that the Father's plan for each family is far more glorious than anything they could plan on their own. The Lord has promised to provide for families. But what the consumer culture has told us is necessary often scares couples into thinking that the Father is not providing enough.

The world tells us that the way we need to prepare for a secure, happy future is with retirement accounts, higher education, technological excellence and the latest consumer gadgets (even when the present ones still work fine). While



Getting There...

Investing in Your Future

It is hard to stay connected — and therefore happy — with your spouse when you are parenting, working, volunteering, and/or involved in hobbies that take you in a million separate directions. Yet no matter where you are in your married life, it is never too late to reconnect as you walk together into your future.

Take some time every day to be together with no distractions. Have a cup of coffee after the kids have left the dinner table, or enjoy a glass of wine together in the evening. (Co-existing in the same room during a half-hour sitcom does not count!) Even if you don't think you have much to say to each other anymore, turn off the television and start the conversation anyway. You'll be amazed at how much happier and secure you will feel if you take time — not to focus on your own needs — but on those of your spouse. ❖

Prayer for the Future: The Rosary

The Blessed Mother asks her children to contemplate the mysteries of the Rosary to help them live their eternal life with Christ starting here and now — and to bring that life to others. If you pray about your future and enlist others to pray with you, you will be amazed at the peace with which you can walk the path the Lord has planned. For a fresh approach to this timeless Catholic prayer, contact the International Catholic Stewardship Council, Inc., for their booklet, *A Stewardship Rosary*. For information, call (202) 289-1093 or email to icsc@catholicstewardship.org. ❖

the world offers wonderful riches, *things* can never satisfy the desires of our hearts. The Church offers people: the very personal security of family, community and a sense of place. This is where our future lies — in the face of another person. All the money in the world cannot provide the same security as one person who loves you with the heart of Christ. ❖ — MBN

Young People Are The Future

Young people are “our hope,” says Pope John Paul II. The Church of the future is theirs. As they grow up and become more aware of the world



around them, it is essential for them to encounter adults who know Christ. This encounter first takes place at home, and then later, in parish life during Mass, catechetical instruction, youth group activities, CYO events and other

parish programs. Sometimes the individualism of our culture can push young people to pursue their destiny separate from the Church. But parishes that provide an attractive community life will always stand ready to welcome them whenever they are ready to pursue their questions about the mystery of Jesus Christ. ❖

Strip, Become A Dealer and Get High

I was born in a family of eight, with an older sister, an older brother, and three younger brothers. When I was a young child, I wanted to be just like my father. I would always follow him around with a makeshift Playskool tool belt, and my fake hammer. I always helped him in the garden, and tried to cast fishing rods the same way he did. Since I was always trying to be like him, when it came to the “rules” he was telling me about my faith; I just accepted them for what they were.

As I got older, however, I needed to know why I believed this. I needed to know why I was sitting in church, listening to people pray the same prayers out loud every week, instead of staying home and watching re-runs of “He-Man,” and the “Thundercats.” I didn’t understand why I had to go to church, and love this God who I could not see or hear. As I began to test this faith, I found that the best way to find out why I did these things was to debate with people and ask them what they thought. When confirmation class came around, I found myself sitting down with my confirmation sponsor and asking him questions about my faith. As I began to ask questions, and figure

out why I should follow these “rules,” I found it easier for me to follow them. I took the church’s faith that was impressed upon me, and turned it into the church’s faith that I chose, for me. I urge you to sit down with someone who believes, and ask questions about your faith.

So how is it that we find this faith in God? I found it in an intimate relationship between myself, and God the Trinity. These relationships turned out to make all the difference in my life. What I’m going to tell you right now is the key to my success, and can be the key to yours. This key can help you unlock all the mysteries of the world, and can make all of your wildest dreams come true. It is simple words of advice: Strip, become a dealer and get high.

First, strip! Strip away all fear and disbelief in God the Father as your Creator and Lord. He loves you and knows you more than anyone on this earth ever will. I want you to think right now about all of your favorite things in this life. What are they? What do they taste and feel like? God created us, and all of these things we love and cherish.

The second key is to become a

dealer, a dealer of Jesus Christ. In everything that I do, I try to bring the inspiration and energy of Jesus Christ to the people that I cater to. The challenge of this second key is to let Christ live in us, and through us — to be Christ for others.

The third key is to get high! To get high on the Holy Spirit. God sent the Holy Spirit to give us, as disciples, the energy, insight, and enthusiasm to go out and bring people to know him and his love, mercy, and kindness. This energy should create a natural high when we are being dealers of Jesus and God’s ministry. We also feel the “Holy Spirit High” when we are amongst friends, and people who share the same views as we do.

Strip away all fear and disbelief in God the Father as your Creator and Lord, become a dealer of Jesus Christ, and get high on your relationship with the Holy Spirit. If you do these three things and find friends who do the same, you will be great servant leaders. ❖ — by Patrick Love, age 17, varsity basketball and saxophone player, volunteer tutor and student at Calvert Hall High School, Baltimore, Maryland. (He’s handsome, too. — The Editor)

Stewards of the Future

One of the ways that we can bring a hopeful future to our friends and neighbors who do not appreciate the Church is to point to the earth as a sign of the sustaining presence of a generous Creator. “A sign” is very different from an environmental issue or political debate. Since we look at all of reality through our union with Christ, we are called to look at the earth, too, with a deep love and reverence.

By concentrating on the Y2K milestone, some futurists seem to have forgotten that the earth has sustained people for millions of years! The fruitful beauty of so many different lands and waters provides food, shelter, transportation and good work to people all over the globe. Yet millennium madness often proposes this abundance as something we need to control and manipulate, fueled by fears that it will all run out if we don’t monitor it carefully.

Sadly, many of us have separated ourselves so far from the earth that we have lost any connection with the original source of our food, water, shelter and clothing. Therefore talk of drought, crop failure and shortages makes us feel even more anxious since we can no longer judge the situation for ourselves. “Man often seems to see no other meaning in his natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption,” observes Pope John Paul II. “Yet it was the Creator’s will that man should communicate with nature as an intelligent and noble ‘master’ and

‘guardian,’ and not as a heedless ‘exploiter’ and ‘destroyer’” (Redeemer of Man).

RECOGNIZING HIS HAND

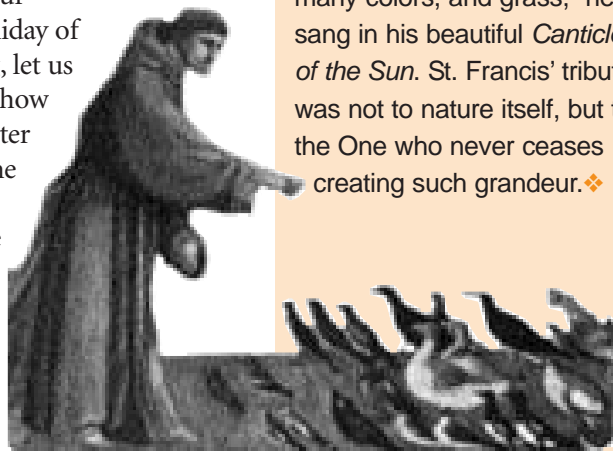
How do we reconnect with the earth and reclaim our heritage as guardians of its future? “Though we have caused the earth to be seriously diseased, it is not yet without health,” says farmer/essayist Wendell Berry. “The earth we have before us now is still abounding and beautiful... The health of nature is the primary ground of hope — if we can find the humility and wisdom to accept nature as our teacher.” As Catholics, we need to lead the way in recognizing the hand of the Lord in the earth’s ability to come back to life even after it has been damaged and destroyed. We need to help our neighbors see that a great love of the earth — and the need for its cultivation and care — is far more than just “good environmental policy.” It is the fruit of the union between the Lord and his people.

This Fall, as we celebrate the harvest and our American holiday of Thanksgiving, let us ask ourselves how we can be better stewards of the gifts of the earth we have received. This means not only feeding and clothing

people in our own communities, but also monitoring policies that threaten people who are hungry, naked and afraid in other parts of the world. The Lord has promised to provide in abundance for each human person. *And through the earth, he has.* Now it is up to us to share what we have to ensure that everyone has the same secure, peaceful future. ❖

LOVER OF THE EARTH

St. Francis of Assisi saw the sign of the Lord’s presence in all of creation. Consequently, he looked at the world with the eyes of a lover: he flirted with the birds, called the moon his “sister” and walked fearlessly with the wolf of Grubbio. He embraced every scenic vista with joy. Yet he never forgot who continued to create it all. “Praised be my Lord for our sister, Mother Earth, who doth sustain us and keep us, and bring forth diverse fruits, and flowers of many colors, and grass,” he sang in his beautiful *Canticle of the Sun*. St. Francis’ tribute was not to nature itself, but to the One who never ceases creating such grandeur. ❖





From the Mystical Monsignor.....

JESUS CHRIST IS OUR FUTURE

We often use the word future to mean the unfolding of the potential of the present. But that is not really a “future” because there is nothing really new appearing. It’s all contained in the present. The real future is the appearance of something new, that did not exist before.

We cannot be the authors of our own future, because we were not the authors of existence. We are not creators. Once we did not exist — and now we do — and we did not do that! Our existence is sheer gift.

In his book *Introduction to Christianity*, Cardinal Ratzinger says that the human future is an advent. It comes to you. It is new. People put their hopes in A future created by us, as in the great ideologies. But this depends upon what we can control. The Christian looks at the future as an advent, as the appearance of something really new. We encounter the future, not create it. We prepare for it in hope, open space for it, so to speak. We move forward as the result of encounters. We are receptive to what comes to us. We plan by receiving our future.

Moving ahead gets better press than moving backwards, but we must be oriented to a real ahead that offers the possibility of newness. Jesus Christ is our future. And so now we can move forward without fear. — *Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, U.S. Ecclesiastical Advisor for Communion and Liberation, an international movement in the Church* ❖

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new creation,” proclaimed St. Paul to the pagan Romans, “the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor 5:17).

As we walk forward into the future with our families, friends and neighbors, let us ask the Lord to give us that newness of human life that is far greater than scientific discovery or innovative technology. Let us ask for a greater confidence in a hopeful future with each other, the natural world, and our eternal destiny—the One we love—Jesus Christ. ❖

Ponder In Your Heart

What are your hopes and fears about the future? (p. 1 and 2)

- How is the every-man-for-himself mentality reflected in the culture?
- What hope for the future does a life with Christ offer to those with whom he is united?

How does the Mass secure our future? (p. 3)

- How can we focus on “living well” in order to “die well”?
- When you receive the living Body of Christ in the Eucharist, do you believe that you will never die?

When a family member dies, how does a life with Christ point toward the future? (p. 4)

- Do you believe deceased family members “know you now in death better than they did in life”?
- Do you ever ask your deceased loved ones to pray for you and your family?

Have you entrusted Christ with the plan for your family’s future? (p. 5)

- Name ways that the culture’s population proposals have affected future generations of your family?
- How can spouses “invest” in their future together?

How does your parish offer the attraction of a future with Christ to young people? (p. 6)

- Why does Pope John Paul II gather with young people annually at World Youth Day?
- Do you pray for young people and ask the Lord to send vocations to your parish?

How can we be stewards of the future of the world? (p. 7)

- How is the earth a sign of the Lord’s providential Presence and care?
- Do you believe the Lord’s promise of abundance for the future of each human person?

Past Relatives that Live in your Future continued from page 4

Missions and a Doctor of the Church. Her eternal life has become a great asset for the Church. It seemed no less plausible to me that my father’s eternal life could become a personal spiritual asset for his family. I think of this now – years later – as I watch my own young children, who never met their grandfather, pray for him as he helps us prepare for the future.

In reality, our families do not break apart in death. Rather, we have a community of souls who can pray for us during our earthly life. This is not only a profound comfort, but also a great asset to each family. ❖