

To Tanya and Bill and Maranda, and all of Tommie's family: as you have experienced in these days, especially yesterday, no words can express our sorrow for you and with you; just please know you have the love and support and prayers of our whole community and don't hesitate to reach out to us, because we are here for you. Some of the rituals of the Mass may be unfamiliar to some here today. You have nothing to worry about. Pray peacefully. Let the words and music saturate your soul. This is a special time of grace for you and for us all.

+ Tommie loved to draw. She was really quite good. When she would draw people, she liked to use that cartoon style with very big eyes. Great big eyes; they weren't afraid eyes, they weren't surprised; they often even had hearts in the middle; and they always looked straight ahead.

Coming to Mass here, as we did just a week ago as a school, we sit in these pews arranged to have everyone look straight ahead all together; and where do we look, where do we fix our eyes? Of course, there to the Cross.

What we have experienced this past week is a puzzle; we can't see the full picture yet. It's still coming together. But each piece is shaped like a cross, all different sizes, from Tommie's 10-year-old cross to the sad heavy ones that we carry now, and they all interlock, with each of us having a part in the whole, and Christ's at the center. Let's start with that piece first.

Then, here's a piece that hooks right together with that big middle one: under normal circumstances, when people come to the end of life, they receive the Last Rites. In Tommie's case, because she had not been baptized, her Last Rites were her first rites, too. She was a Saint in the sense of our school and team mascot; but far more, because she was baptized and couldn't commit a single sin after, she is now without doubt an official Saint in Heaven. It is not too much to call her "Saint Tommie."

In the celebration of those Sacraments, she was blessed by being marked with that Sign of the Cross, the same cross that adorns the walls of our homes, hangs on a chain around our necks, is present in every classroom, that Christ Our Lord used to conquer death by His Resurrection, to take away pain and sadness and give us eternal life in Heaven... in other words, to make us real Saints, too. That's what we are training for and preparing for through our life of Faith. And we need Faith: Our Lord is the only one who can give us that gift of salvation, that reward of everlasting happiness. It is not the presence or words or wisdom of any human person, but only His grace that makes us Saints. She has that grace now; and we pray for it.

How that all works in His great plan is certainly mysterious; now is not the time to answer all the many "Why?" questions, or put every piece in place. As that Cross mosaic comes together, here's what we do, how we start: focus on His central Cross, always, putting each of our crosses around it, concentrating straight ahead together, taking in the whole picture as we can, but always looking to Him, with great big, wide-open spiritual eyes. +