

## TYPING IN TEARS

*(Moy's Papa wrote this during Lent 2005)*

Hosea 5:15-6:2 *"Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."*

"Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind our wounds. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence."

These verses were the Old Testament readings for the fourth Sunday in Lent that I heard at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, Moose Lake, Minnesota. When the Pastor spoke, I thought to myself that these words were meant for me.

Early last year at this time, my oldest son Moisés (Moy) Langhorst was fulfilling his dream of being a U.S. Marine infantryman. Deployed to Iraq, Private First Class Langhorst was serving in the city of Ar Ramadi, which is part of the "Sunni Triangle". Moy's letters home indicated that things were heating up. He wrote of mortar attacks and casualties. Knowing his letters were 2-3 weeks behind real time, I became preoccupied with any news from Iraq-- TV, radio, and internet or otherwise. Despite my seemingly constant prayer, the worry knowing that my first-born son was in harms way, was tearing me apart. I had little interest in doing anything except searching for news. Some how it seemed to me, that if I knew what was going on, then I could write the right stuff in my letters to protect my dear son and safely guide him home. Every day I waited for the mail hoping and praying for a letter from Moy so that I could quickly write back to him with advice to get him through whatever battles he was fighting. Before he left for Iraq, we told him that we would include him in our evening meal prayer because it approximated the time he would be waking in Iraq. Please Lord keep Moy safe this day. The war news grew worse. Almost daily, Marines were being killed in Fallujah. I prayed more. On Palm Sunday, a Marine from southern Minnesota was killed. Selfishly, I thanked God that Moy was not stationed in Fallujah and that it was not my Marine who had been killed. On Monday of Holy Week, we received a letter from Moy. Great! Except, he wrote that he was being worn down by the endless patrolling of the Ar Ramadi streets and that he had caught a cold. I could tell my son was down and being tested by his experience. When I read the conclusion of his letter, I was reassured because as always he concluded the letter saying he would deal with these hardships in prayer. Leaving work early, I went to the store to buy goodies to send in a care package to Moy. On Tuesday of Holy Week, my wife prepared the package and dropped it in the mail. At work, I quickly typed a letter (*read inspired writings April 6, 2004*) hoping and praying the words would lift Moy's spirit. Tormented by the constant bad news, my job was suffering as well as my roles of father to my younger son and husband to my wife. Moy had been in Iraq less than a month on a seven-month deployment and it was tearing me to pieces. How would I make it through six more months?

The same day my wife sent Moy his package of goodies, I read on the internet that there had been a major clash in Ar Ramadi between Marines and insurgents. Unable to focus at work I went home to see if my wife had heard more and to check the mail. Previously, I had promised a woman at church that my younger son and I would help move a couch for her. Completing the favor, I got into my pickup to drive home and anxious to hear more news I immediately turned on the radio with the first sounds being "at least twelve Marines were killed in Ar Ramadi". My heart sank, wondering if I would be able to drive home. Arriving home, I asked my wife if she had heard. Yes. We spoke few words during our evening meal. We waited. At 8:30, that night a van pulled up and parked under our bay window. The familiar Marine white barracks covers (hats) setting in the dash identified the unmarked van. Seeing this I dropped to my knees screaming "Oh God not Moy". Two enlisted Marines in dress blues and a Navy chaplain entered our home and began reciting their rehearsed lines. My wife told them never mind because we already knew. Pfc. Moisés Albert Langhorst had been killed in action.

How would this wound heal? I was in such shock and disbelief that I could not even pray. Finally, after two days of mental misery and sleepless nights at the Maundy Thursday Worship Service I knew that I had to return to the Lord in prayer. The urge to pray was countered by thoughts of "How could God take such a loving and faithful son?" I did not feel that God had forsaken me but that he had forsaken Moy. Even being Moy's father, I had always been in awe of his faith in Jesus Christ. Moy's letters from Iraq included his 10% tithe for St. Peter's Church. Moy lived his faith in thought, word and deed. He acknowledged in his letters from Iraq that he was "in the valley of the shadow of death" and that he prayed always. Struggling to fall asleep that night my wounded heart pressed into prayer even though my mind did not know what to pray. Upset, tired, and confused that my earlier prayers for Moy's safe return were not answered as I expected, God led me to pray "The Lord's Prayer" repeatedly. Soon I began to savor each word and recalled Catechism explanations and Bible verses for each petition. Earnestly seeking more relief for my grief, I went on to recite the "Apostles Creed" over and over. Needing still, more comfort I searched my heart for memorized Bible verses; each one that God brought to me was like salve on my wounds. I fell asleep that night sure and

certain knowing Jesus had my hand and that Moy was in His arms. On Good Friday, we remembered our Lord's Passion wondering how much had our son suffered. On Easter Sunday, we rejoiced in His resurrection believing in Jesus Christ Moy is alive!

Moy's death in battle was an untimely earthly tragedy. In heaven, it was a great victory as another son of God had returned to the Lord. Jesus Christ saved Moy through the gift of faith received in baptism, confirmation, partaking of Holy Communion and in the hearing the Word. Jesus Christ protected and guided Moy safely back to his loving Father in heaven. This father knows that he was welcomed with the words, "well done good and faithful servant." God kept all His promises and answered Moy's prayers and mine. After all, what more can an earthly father ask than to have his son granted the gift of eternal life. Our loving merciful Father was not done. In my search for comfort from my sorrow, God bonus blessed me by affirming my faith as described in Hebrews 11:1 "*Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*".

This Lenten Season is special for me. I still feel my wound and some nights I find myself on that dusty street in Ar Ramadi that the Marines named Easy Street before it became so hard for them. Looking down I see my son Moy at my feet bleeding from his head, arm and midsection. Moy does not move, whatever suffering there was has ended, and he is at Peace. I do not try to revive him but I feel helpless and despair that I could not protect him. Then I look up seeing God's Son Jesus Christ on the cross in pain and suffering with wounds exposed and I know that He is not helpless. Thanks be to God, in faith I reach and touch His wounds knowing they healed Moy's and in time will heal mine. Jesus is the One who overcame sin, death and the devil so that sinners, like Moy and I, who believe in Him will have eternal life *together* in heaven. I am at Peace knowing my treasure is in heaven.

*But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me! Psalms 66: 19-20*