

I would like to turn from natural disasters this month and instead write about a more tragic experience. The truth is that whatever is taken from us materially when nature unleashes its fury can be restored to us. There is something infinitely more valuable and irreplaceable that we sometimes take for granted.

What images do the phrases “making final arrangements” and “pre-burial planning” conjure? Putting business affairs in order? Making sure your will is up-to-date? Making your loved ones comfortable after you’ve gone? All of this is needed and can help ease the transition for those that are left behind. The issue I see with this is that all you are doing is seeing to the physical comforts of those who shared your life with you. What about the emotional disaster your loss will bring to the ones you held most dear in your lifetime? Are you prepared to leave this life with their emotional well-being in order? If the answer is no or I’m not sure, now might be the time to dwell on such things.

Do you know what the daughter of your spouse’s second cousin is doing in her life? Do you know who your aunt’s great-nephew is dating? Closer to home, are you aware of what is happening in your sibling’s “world” the past 6 months? When was the last time you spoke with both of your parents, not just one? (This is assuming that both your parents are still alive). These scenarios may seem a bit farfetched and unlikely unless you happen to be a part of my extended family. Sadly to say, what I’ve just described is too true in my own family. I’ve allowed physical distance and different interests keep me from engaging with my own flesh and blood. I’m guilty of not maintaining ties to my own biological family. The story is quite different in my wife’s family. There is a closeness among 5 generations that is very admirable. Anne’s family has had extremely strong bonds since before I knew any of them. The family theme song is “Blest be the Tie that Binds”, and it is not just for show. My first encounter with the family was at Christmas in Chicago. Family members from Florida and the east coast gathered simply because that is what they do. Every 3 years since 1980 the extended family meets somewhere east of the Mississippi for a 3-day celebration of life and family. We have attended many landmark birthdays and weddings in the 30-plus years of our marriage. And we have even gathered en masse for funerals, but these were not sad events. There are always joyous memories and happy emotions despite the flow of tears. These people understand the concept of FAMILY. I pray that we can all adopt this principle. My wife is “fond” of reminding me that life is meant to be enjoyed and shared with others. This is so true.

I want to dedicate this month’s thoughts to my wife’s first cousin Ron Jones. Ron left this earth on February 24 in a tragic accident. Although he is no longer with us we carry fond memories of the way Ron lived the life God gave him and the way he embraced family.

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