

FROM THE DEACON'S BENCH

I had written an article about finding the joy in the bleakness of winter, after the Christmas rush. Some people at work said they saw joy in the falling snow as they sat inside by a fire. Another said winter meant more time inside, quality time with his family. Still another thought the added darkness gave them time to catch up on their sleep. There are many joys to be found during the dark winter months, but sometimes that joy of winter turns into real bleakness.

For us, that bleak, dark time is in the loss of The Reverend Cindy Tipton-Zile, our friend, our priest, the wife of our own Father Eric. Many of you knew Cindy Tipton-Zile much longer than I, but in our brief time, Cindy+ was a genuinely kind, warm, and caring person. She supported me during my ministry and told Eric when he was wrong about my angel tree! The loss of Cindy+ brings a different bleakness to our winter and our world, but Cindy+ was a woman of great faith and she would want us to rely on our own faith to see us through this difficult time.

Several years ago, I lost a dear brother-in-law in the month of September before our 20th annual camping trip. He was always an integral part of our trip. We still took our trip, but there was a definite loss not having him there and I even said out loud, "Charlie, I really miss you!" That night, my husband was really snoring in our tent so I slept in the car. Early the next morning, I heard a tapping on the car window; first one side then the other. I finally looked, and there was a cardinal flying back and forth tapping on the mirrors of my car. When I returned to work and mentioned this incident, someone said when a cardinal comes to you it's really a visitation from a departed loved one. Hmm, guess Charlie was there after all!!

My own joy of winter is to watch the birds coming to my feeders. I have 3 pairs of Cardinals; it gives me a sense of peace to think I'm surrounded by my departed loved ones.

Interestingly, Saturday, the day after Cindy+ passed, there was a large bang on my window. I looked out, and there was a cardinal lying on the grass. I went out, it was still breathing, so I brought it inside to keep it warm. Its eyes were closing, its beak was open, and I was sure it was in the process of dying, but after holding it for a bit, it began to open its eyes and its breathing became regular. I took it outside, but it refused to fly away. I brought it back inside and soon it was blinking, and looking intensely at me. I took it outside again, it sat for a moment in my hands looking at me and then, it flew away.

Are visiting cardinals messengers from loved ones? I like to believe so. A cardinal shows up tapping on my car windows after I lose my brother-in-law; then a cardinal fell right on my lawn the very morning after Cindy+ passed. It, like Cindy+, spent a brief moment with me, and then flew away.

Think what you want, but I believe Charlie and Cindy+ were letting me know they're OK and are still with us, watching over us, and loving us. Maybe take a second look the next time you see a cardinal!

Peace,

Cindy+