

As you know I was off last week and planned a very simple time of contemplation that included fasting from my tech devices. Then my mother got sick and my brother bypassed my fast by going through Susan and I found myself in Sarnia trying to be a good and attentive son, not something I've always done well.

My mother was in and out of hospital and she is 89 and we are alike in being rather frail of nature and so issues of mortality come quickly to mind when this sort of thing happens.

She lives in a senior's residence much like Heritage River in Elora. One day while she was resting I went up stairs to the library they have. Next to churches I find libraries the best of

sanctuaries. There was a woman in the library, sitting quietly, reading. I sat an appropriate distance away and pretended to look at a book. She rose and I assumed that she was leaving but instead she came and sat in the chair beside me.

"You're Anna's son" she said. I said, "yes, I am." She said, "Anna's not well." I said, "that is true." Then she said, "this is a place for dying. Some people pretend it's not and they eat and drink and laugh as though life will go on forever but we are all old and death awaits and I think it good to remember that."

Now through the years I have been in many such places but I honestly don't remember anyone being that forthright in talking about death and dying. In

all honesty it was refreshing. I was tempted to ask her if she was busy on Ash Wednesday, if she might like to be the guest speaker in an Anglican church but instead I said, “how does it affect how you live, remembering that you will die?”

And she smiled and said, “that’s the right question. People carry on about bucket lists but that’s just a way to get them to spend more money. I say live simply, forgive yourself and others if you can, and be thankful for the taste of life you have sampled.”

I said I thought her words wise and she chuckled and said, “thanks for listening to an old woman.” And with that she rose and shuffled out of the room.

Shortly thereafter I went back down to my mother’s suite. She was awake and asked where I had gone. I said, “the library” and she enquired further so I told her about my encounter. She said, “oh, that’s Velma, don’t pay her any mind.” Knowing my mother as I do I said, “yes ma’am” and did not bring it up again.

But Velma’s words are worth repeating...live simply, forgive yourself and others if you can, and be thankful for the taste of life you have sampled. They are a blueprint for how to do lent. If you so live you will not fear the cross nor will you be surprised by the resurrection.

Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return. Amen.