

At least with the first reading, the disciples are questioned as to why they keep staring up towards the heavens, as if the dreaded ascension of their Lord and Savior, their friend, their companion, their God-in-the-flesh, was not a good enough reason. Of course, long before they were ridiculed for looking up, they were criticized for looking down far, far too often: looking down in disbelief, fear, and shame; all the while their God-in-their-very-flesh was standing right in front of them revealing to them just how much this God cherished the whole world.

A few years ago, I was looking down, myself, at the gravestone of my grandmother in Westerville, Ohio, but there's a complicated story behind it. You see, when I was growing up one of my nerdy obsessions was U.S. Presidential history. My elementary school had this book fair going on in the hallway between the cafeteria and the kitchen, where we picked up our lunch. So, as I walked by the massive selection, I saw this book entitled *Our American Presidents*, and I am certain that the only reason why I was even remotely interested is that there was this guy named Ross Perot running for President at the time. And, in my elementary school brain, I was convinced I was somehow related to the guy with his first name being my last name. (I

guess it wouldn't be awful to be related to a billionaire, but that's beside the point.) Nevertheless, I read the book. I memorized the full names of all the presidents in order of their service in office, and, in due time, I started to give mini-presentations in class on the past presidents' birthdays, and even did a little something special when President Richard Nixon died that got me on the front page of the local newspaper. (Obviously my hometown was begging for news, but minor detail.) Soon enough my grandfather started taking me to birthplaces and museums of the former presidents: all the ones in Ohio, and even as far away as FDR's in New York and John Adams and JFK in Massachusetts.

And, then, he planned a trip that would also include my mom and grandmother that would take us up into New England and down into Virginia. Except, when we got to Schenectady, New York, my grandmother started to feel this pain in her head. We pulled over at a rest stop and an ambulance had to be called in to take her to the local hospital. She improved well enough to be transferred back to Westerville, but that only lasted for a few days, before she died. Oddly enough she would be buried on my twelfth birthday.

I still remember being upstairs at my grandparents' house crying, because in my age-twelve-mind, it was my fault that she died. If that trip didn't happen, she would still be alive. If she wasn't in a car with the sun beaming down through the windows, none of this would have happened. It was all my fault. My face was downward, to say the least. But as much as I remember that, I also remember, just as much, my oldest sister coming in to console me that ended up raising my face forward to witness the family that my grandmother helped shape over a generation.

But, back again to a few years ago, looking down at her gravestone: I may not have had quite the same age-twelve mindset beating myself up for her death, as if something wouldn't have happened to her anyway. And yet, there's still just that slightest minute part of the mind that wonders. But as I stood looking down at her gravestone, rather eerily similar, I'm sure, to the disciples looking down not just after Good Friday, but throughout years of struggle trying to figure out what this whole life was about with Jesus Christ: that day my mother was with me, and she said something that I still cherish to this day: "She would be proud of you." Yet again, my face was lifted up within an instant.

Today there will be plenty of faces looking up at family gatherings, so incredibly thankful for mothers, living and past, and the families they continue to impact. However, we also know there will be just as many faces pointed downward: for those with not-the-best of relationships with their mother, for mothers lost tragically, for the ones who don't even know who their mother is, and countless of imperfect circumstances in between.

We may not have the problem of staring up into the heavens as the disciples did with the Ascension, but there are many among us with faces to the ground out of sadness, disbelief, fear, shame, and even anger and hatred. And yet, God blesses all of us with the greatest gift of all: that Christ does not stay in the heavens, but comes to life in each of us, to lift faces up to see God first-hand in each other, to witness the hope that can overcome any unpleasant circumstances that attempt to define our life. No matter what has happened, God cherishes us more than we can ever imagine. And so we lift our faces to see God still at work, still bringing the love of Jesus Christ to life right in front of our very eyes throughout this life and forevermore. And for that, we most certainly give thanks to God indeed! Amen.