

Holy Week 2015: Remembering Terri Schindler Schiavo and Suffering Servants

“What will be forever seared in my memory is the look of utter horror on my sister’s face when my family visited her just after she died.” –Bobby Schindler, brother of Terri Schindler Schiavo

“He had no dignity or beauty to make us take notice of him. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him. We despised him and rejected him; he endured suffering and pain. No one would even look at him—we ignored him as if he were nothing.” (Isaiah 53:2b-3, the Suffering Servant prophesy of Our Lord Jesus Christ)

March 31, 2015, three days into Holy Week, sadly, marks the tenth anniversary of the death of Terri Schindler Schiavo, who was ordered to die by Circuit Court Judge, George W. Greer of Pinellas County, Florida. Terri starved and dehydrated to death in the most acute, barbaric form over a period of fourteen days through denial of food and water. The quote above by Terri’s brother, no doubt, conveys the truth of her death as opposed to the lies we were fed by the mainstream media.

A Life News article (<http://www.lifenews.com/2015/03/30/i-will-never-forget-the-look-of-horror-on-my-sister-terri-schiavos-face-the-day-she-died/>) dated March 30, 2015 contains a graphic picture of Terri’s face as her brother Bobby Schindler recalled just before her death. The article is preceded by a disclaimer warning of this graphic sketch. Some people will not be willing to look at her face. I can recall many people did not want to watch *The Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, directed by Mel Gibson and released during Lent 2004, nearly a year before Terri died. Gibson was criticized for portraying Jesus’ death in such a graphic and horrifying manner. And the criticism was part of the campaign to censor the movie. While Terri was dying, the television media conveniently refused to let us see her face.

In the same way, the abortion industry tries to shelter women from ultrasonic images that humanize preborn persons. The ultrasonic images allow us to see their faces. I have read that 9 out of 10 women who see an ultrasound image of their unborn child will refuse to abort. I recall several years ago listening to a talk given by a biology professor from Geneva College, who showed public school students graphic images of aborted preborn persons. I vividly recall one male student, after viewing the images, concluding out loud to his school mates that abortion is “murder.” If we had been allowed to see Terri’s face which conveyed the stark reality of the horror of forced starvation, there would have been a massive outcry by the public to end this horrifying travesty of justice. When the public is shown the graphic images of the starvation victims of the Holocaust, are we not reminded that it must never happen again?

In Case We Have Forgotten, Who Is Terri Schiavo?

Terri was a cognitively disabled young woman who was unable to swallow food owing to brain damage which resulted from a period of hypoxia after suffering cardiac arrest. As a nurse, I have taken care of many patients, particularly those in long-term care, who were unable to swallow. Most of these persons suffered from strokes. I can remember one woman—I will call her Flo—who endured a stroke that made it difficult for her to speak as well as to swallow her medications. And because of this, she had a PEG tube, a type of tube that is placed in the stomach from the

outside of one's body. For the most part, Flo was able to eat, although her food had to be prepared and served in a way that would protect her from choking and from aspiration. She communicated through gestures and a limited ability to speak. But with time, the nursing staff understood what she was saying. All of her medications were given through her PEG tube. This tube was a life line that kept Flo alive for many years. Other residents were not as fortunate as Flo, as some totally lost their ability to communicate and/or to swallow and were given all of their nutrition through feeding tubes.

Because of what I had experienced with many precious lives like Flo, particularly with the elderly and the disabled, the two weeks preceding Terri Schindler Schiavo's death caused me massive consternation. I awakened many times in the middle of the night during those two weeks shaking and crying, knowing full well what would have happened if one of the persons for whom I had previously cared, had their feeding tube pulled and were denied food and water.

And Our Lord has not let me forget Terri's death. Exactly three years later, on March 31, 2008, my own father died. And the greatest irony of all is that only nine months after Terri's death, my late husband Michael, on December 23, 2005 was diagnosed with a rare appendiceal cancer. After two major cancer surgeries, Michael was left with only six feet of small intestine—normal length in an adult male is between 22 to 23 feet—a small part of his stomach, and about 1.5 feet of his large intestine, which is normally about 5 feet. The shortening of his intestines induced a protracted starvation that lasted approximately seven years, during which he lost nearly 100 pounds. The choice of total parental nutrition, or TPN, which is nutrition delivered directly into the bloodstream, was not really a viable option for Michael because the nutrients would have fed the cancer that could never be totally removed from his abdominal cavity. Michael eventually became so thin that I could easily grasp every border of his scapula and hold it in my hand. At the time of his death, he could not have weighed more than 75 or 80 pounds.

I could never downplay the horror of starvation, whether it occurs over a short time or over an extended period of time. But at least Michael's body—specifically, his metabolism—was, at least to some degree, able to make adjustments that allowed him to survive more than three years beyond his second major surgery. However, he suffered from a lot of abdominal pain, mostly owing to partial blockages that developed from the cancer, and increased intestinal motility that caused chronic diarrhea. The chronic loss of fluids caused chronic dry skin. And eventually his heart failed because it was not getting the nutrients it needed. Despite his suffering, Michael always had a positive outlook on life. Because of his strong Catholic Faith, he suffered with courage and true dignity. He spent about ten months *properly placed* in hospice care. Because he was a light to so many who cared for him and who visited him, he was nicknamed "St. Michael" by the hospice nursing staff.

Appearance is "Reality," Unfortunately

My own sweet Michael's journey through hospice was bittersweet. He is terribly missed by me, his family, and friends, but Michael wanted to go "home". Everyone was properly prepared for his death. I cannot say the same for Terri Schindler Schiavo's death. Those two weeks were a living Hell not only for Terri, but for the entire Schindler family. First of all, Terri never belonged in a

hospice facility. Her proper place should have been with the Schindler family who desperately wanted to care for her. I believe her placement in a hospice facility was an evil publicity stunt set up by Michael Schiavo and his extremely misguided attorney George Felos. It was done to make her appear as though she was dying. Her forced death was a brutal *severing* of Terri from those who genuinely loved her. Unfortunately, we live in a society in which appearance is reality, and many people are unable or unwilling to think critically and look deeply into ethical and moral issues.

Contraception: the Root of the Acceptance of Abortion and Euthanasia

The first moral issue that comes to my mind is the widespread acceptance of contraception by many Catholics. The Church's teachings regarding human sexuality are beautiful, but many Catholics, unfortunately, refuse to research Holy Mother Church's authentic teachings.

And it is this acceptance that has led to the widespread acceptance of abortion, and now, increased acceptance of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. Once the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act are *severed* from each other, the procreative potential of the sex act becomes subjugated to pleasure and gratification. Bringing a human being into existence is looked upon not as a gift, but instead, a casualty and a burden. Once a human being is viewed as a casualty, anything goes. Terri Schindler Schiavo was looked upon by Michael Schiavo and George Felos as a casualty, as someone standing in the way of Schiavo's desire to be with another woman. He was blinded by a secular mentality that did not see Terri as *gift*. Terri's family, on the other hand, saw themselves as persons who had something—their love, their care, their genuine compassion—to *offer Terri*. Their hearts—always open to life—also saw Terri as one of the greatest gifts God could have given them. I can say all of this with certainty, as I have had the awesome privilege to meet each member of the Schindler family. They are authentic, kind, generous, and truly compassionate.

Holy Week: Let Us Remember Those Who Have Suffered

I am challenging every person to look upon the face of the late Terri Schindler Schiavo, the image that Life News has so boldly given us. Let us look upon the face of one who suffered horribly from a grossly unjust legal decision. To look upon Terri's marred appearance is to see the face of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who was also unjustly condemned to die. Bobby Schindler and Life News have offered us a very tangible likeness of the One who was despised and rejected and Who even felt abandoned by His Father, the One who was ignored "as if he were nothing," as the prophet Isaiah has written. Let us also remember all those who have starved and suffered, especially the victims of the Holocaust. Let us continue to pray that a "culture of life" will finally prevail in this world.

About the Author:

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