



One of the heart-warming moments from the Olympic Winter Games that concluded two weeks ago today was the United States hockey team winning the gold medal for the first time since the historic “Miracle on Ice” nearly half a century before. Nevertheless, the ultimate pulling at all the emotions scene was not when the victorious goal was scored by the Americans in overtime or the thrilling pandemonium that ensued from the team. It was when amidst

the postgame celebration that this young woman and two children emerged on the ice, with a story that no level of sports production on television can truly reveal the depth of it all.

In the summer of 2022, a young up-and-coming hockey star signed with the NHL team just down the road from us on I-71 in the Columbus Blue Jackets. Johnny Gaudreau was hoped to be a pivotal piece in lifting the team to further playoff success, but supposedly part of the reason why he desired a move to our state capital was that he was convinced it would be a fitting place to raise a young family. In a few months, the first one in Noa was born. A year-and-a-half later came Johnny, Jr. And then, the family story took a turn for the absolute worst.

That following summer, Johnny and his brother were about to be in their sister’s wedding in New Jersey, and they decided to go out riding bikes to take in the picturesque rural landscape before the ceremony the following day. And then, out of nowhere, came a car that struck them from behind, leaving both Gaudreau boys, ages 31 and 29, gone. And with that, for Johnny, leaving behind his wife Meredith, and two children, ages 2 and six months, and perhaps even worse, Meredith was also pregnant at the time, delivering the third, named Carter, a few months later.

The team did their best to honor Johnny during this latest run, as he most certainly would have been on the Olympic roster, as they kept his jersey hanging in the locker room. When they took the final picture with all the players and staff after pulling off the better-than-Hollywood storybook ending, in the middle was Johnny’s jersey, and the two oldest children right beside it. Yes, better than a Hollywood storybook ending to be sure, especially with that day two weeks ago, being Johnny, Jr.’s 2nd birthday, but still unspeakably tragic, still beyond words, pulling at all the human emotions.

Meredith, at least publicly, says all the right things, takes all the appearances in stride with a bright smile and authentic enthusiasm, and perhaps the children at such a young age do not fully realize all that’s going on and why, but it is one of those real human stories that sometimes makes me wonder about this passage from Romans that we heard today. It is a treasured collection of verses for many, to be sure, inspiring numerous children of God since its writing thousands of years ago. As one translation has it: “We...boast in our [sufferings], knowing that [suffering] produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not [disappoint us].” It’s been made into refrigerator magnets and has served as a page to turn to for countless many children of God enduring whatever form of suffering, desperately looking for any sign of hope amidst medical setbacks and far-too-long of recoveries.

Regardless, the words have more than beautifully worked as a soul-soothing remedy of sorts for abundantly many. All well and good. But hopefully the church can humbly recognize that it isn’t always that simple for those who suffer unspeakable tragedy in this life. For some, it isn’t always so straightforward that their personal or family suffering will eventually produce faithful endurance and that will, soon enough, lead to life-shaping character, that will, in the end, give them the hope that will

sustain them for the rest of their earthly journey. Granted, for some, it goes exactly that way, with triumphant stories that pull at our heartstrings, too.

And yet, during this season of Lent, when we do our fair share of mentioning not just about a cross on Calvary, but the suffering that comes and goes in our own life; the church must also recognize that we are as much here for the ones for whom these long-cherished verses from Romans do not hit, as the ones for which they do. The church of Jesus Christ is as much here for those for whom the aftermath seems impossible to traverse, who seem to never recover. No matter what, the church boldly stands for them, too, because we believe Christ is doing the exact same. That we will do our part to persistently endure for them. That we will cling to a character of the One who will still live and die and rise for those whose faith journeys cannot always match up to what's described in Scripture. That we will always proclaim the hope that was brought to life for all children of God: no matter how much they struggle for whatever happens in their life, even if they cannot explain exactly why. That even if those words do not always apply to everyone, other words from Paul most certainly do: nothing can happen in this life to separate us from the love of God brought to life in Jesus Christ, our Lord. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!