

T-shirts, mothers and life everlasting

By [Bill Grimm](#) | [Japan](#)

October 19, 2020

"We will in some way continue to exist, continue to know. And be known by God. And that being known will be then, as it is now, the cause of our existence."



Tiffany & Co. 5th Ave, Midtown, NYC (Photo by [Ajay Suresh](#), New York)

Walking along New York's Fifth Avenue one spring day, I noticed a crowd at the windows of the Tiffany & Co. jewelry store. Tiffany's creative window displays are always worth turning aside to see, but I had never seen them attract such a crowd.

People were chuckling, and as is usual when New Yorkers find themselves in a crowd they were exchanging comments and wisecracks. I went over to see what the fuss was.

The store has small windows on its two street sides; showing a gem doesn't require a big window. They were decorated for Mothers' Day.

In each window were small clotheslines with miniature white T-shirts hanging on them like laundry. On each shirt was a different quote from every mother's repertoire. "Wait till your father gets home!" "Because I'm the mother!" "If Johnny jumps off a bridge, will you jump too?" "Wash your hands." "This room is a pig pen," "Eat your vegetables."

As I recall, there were about 50 of them, and like everyone else reading them, I had heard them many times. I assume that a similar display could be shown in any language, in any culture.

Are new mothers given a pamphlet containing their lines? I suppose they learn them as girls from hearing their own mothers. Eve may have been the only mother who needed a script.

My mother had a line that was not on the T-shirts: "You're going to be dead a long time."

It was a multi-purpose line when Mom said it, and still is when I say it to myself. It can mean, "Life is short, so treasure it while you have it," or, "Life is short, so don't delay over what you must do," or, "Don't let trivial matters control your life," or, "What awaits you after death is too big to not take it into account now."

In the Creed we proclaim that we believe in "the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting." No one really knows what that means beyond a hopeful conviction that life is not simply an interlude between pre-conception and post-death non-existence.

We will in some way continue to exist, continue to know. And be known by God. And that being known will be then, as it is now, the [cause of our existence](#).

We know no more than that, but we want more, so we resort to poetry. Not rhyme like "Mary had a little lamb," but verbal and visual imagery that goes beyond what mere words and pictures present on the surface. We use images of music, clouds, halos, wings, and gates with St. Peter there like a maître d' admitting new arrivals.

My own imagining of what happens after death involves judgement.

St. Paul tells us that, "Now I know only in part, then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). One thing I will fully know will be myself. I will know the ways in which my life has been true to my calling as a child of God. I will know all the people and events that helped shape my life, many of them long before I lived.

But I will also know the ways in which I have betrayed my vocation, betrayed others, and betrayed God. I have wasted the legacy of generations before me; I have passed on to those yet to come a world marred by my carelessness and selfishness. Perhaps my

purgatory will be spent going from person to person to apologize while being challenged to accept the apologies of others. I call it the Big Blush.

That blush will take place in the midst of a festival of God's forgiveness, the forgiveness we profess in the Creed even before resurrection and life everlasting. It will be a joyous blush, but a blush nonetheless.

Lately, looking at the political news from Brazil, China, Hungary, North Korea, the Philippines, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, and almost every other country including my own United States, I wish Mom were around to say to the so-called political "leaders" (it's too generous to call what they do "leadership"), "You're going to be dead a long time."

Their short-term opportunistic manoeuvring, even if successful for their lifetime and even beyond for a few years or even decades, is infinitesimally small compared to the amount of blushing they are setting themselves up for.

But they are not the only ones who need to be reminded that if our destiny is life everlasting, that fact must shape what we do and how we do it here and now while we have a here and now.

Certainly the response to the pandemic on the part of many people will set them up to blush when they know as they are known. That includes people whose attitude seems to be, "To hell or the hospital with anyone else, I want to go to church!"

If I lived preparing to ease my Big Blush, what would I do? What would I avoid doing? What would I do to help others lessen their eventual embarrassment? Simply put, I would care for others now rather than eventually having to seek their forgiveness later.

I would live the advice on yet another of the Tiffany T-shirts: "Play nice."

Bill Grimm is a Catholic priest and Maryknoll missionary who lives in Japan.

Source: <https://international.la-croix.com/>