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**FATHER ANTON'S WORDS OF WISDOM:** In the last few weeks I have been helping one of our retired and elderly priests prepare to enter long term care, and plan his funeral as well, and choose his headstone. Amid the extra business as well as attending to the work of the parish, we have had the chance for a few good conversations. He remarked to me the other day, "You know, it's strange to sit and think about your end." I have sat often and reminded myself that I have more days behind me than ahead of me, and oddly enough the idea of knowing this has never really bothered me. At a young age, my grandmother taught me that death was a part of life. "The minute you are born," she said, "you being to prepare for your departure." Our earthly life is as much an adventure as it is a journey, and when accompanied with faith the experience is

"out of this world." I have had a remarkably interesting, and often challenging life, especially as a child, and in my younger years where it seemed everything was about struggle, I used to question a lot, especially asking "Why?" Over time I came to understand and accept that that was an answer that I would never get, so, instead I decided to change the way I thought. I believe that those things that we have no control over simply need to be accepted, or we can never move forward. Again, I quote my late grandmother, "Remember, in life there are no mistakes, so long as you allow them to become lessons." I think that this is what my colleague who I am trying to help is doing now. At the age of 90 he is reviewing the past and contemplating what is to come. I reassured him that God is bigger than our weaknesses and that His love far outweighs our shortcomings. I reminded him, that when we do the best we know how at the time, there are no regrets and that when we "know better, we do better." I have no regrets in life, and as I remember that my days too, are numbered it does not instill in me a sense of fear, for I feel deep within me that death is no more than a falling asleep to earthly existence and awaking in the presence of Christ. This is what I live for, and therefore I chose to serve Him. In our world today, we need to prepare our children for the reality of death. We should not be hiding it from them, keeping them from funeral home visitations or funerals for those we love. There will always be a mystery that surrounds death, but there should not be fear... it is as natural to die as it is to be born. For the Christian we believe that there is something beyond this life that awaits us. We pray in our prayers for the deceased "Grant them a place of happiness and peace, where there is no more sickness, suffering, nor sighing, but life everlasting. I understand as well that grief that comes with losing someone we love, how our heart pains and there is a void left behind that can only be filled with memories and the love that remains. As Christians we believe that we will be united again with our loved ones, and that for know, we are united by the unbreakable bond of love, and by our prayers. As St. Ambrose puts it: "Life has not ended, it has merely changed." So, there you have it... this is my understanding of life and death." I had my headstone installed on my grave a year ago, and every Sunday morning on my way to the Church I pick up a coffee and visit my niece whose life was taken far to soon, but sitting there with her even for that short time; I know she is saying she is okay and life must continue. Then, I go to my own graveside and visit my headstone... it keeps me grounded and the idea that one day I will lay there to rest feels good. Then, off to celebrate Mass and continue to live, and here lies a good lesson, "One day we will die, but every other day we will live," so let us make the best of it. Let us live, love and

have faith. Let us leave the worrying to God and face each new day with gratefulness for the gift of life. Then, on that day we awake in the presence of our God we shall feel his loving embrace for all eternity.

**“LET ME KNOW, O LORD MY END, AND WHAT IS THE NUMBER OF MY DAYS, THAT I MAY LEARN HOW FRAIL I AM. A SHORT SPAN YOU HAVE MADE MY DAYS AND MY LIFE IS AS NAUGHT BEFORE YOU. ONLY A BREATH IS ANY HUMAN EXISTENCE.” PSALM 39: 5,6.**