



A Christian Dies in Oregon

I met her only once, when her husband Ryan introduced us in December 2014 after Mass in Portland. The few minutes we spoke were enough for me to learn a startling truth: this vibrant-looking mother of four playfully-circling little children had inoperable stage IV kidney cancer. She was 33 years old; doctors gave her less than two years to live.



The daughter of a Chinese mother and an American father, Lizz Lovett grew up a Buddhist in Japan. Years later she found herself navigating the turbulent waters of conversion to the Catholicism of her fiancé, Ryan. But the thought of making his faith her own raised a doubt she found hard to dismiss: would she be entering the Church just for the sake of the man she loved?

Her soul-stirring struggle came to a climax one night in Virginia as the couple knelt together before a statue of Our Lady in the Cathedral of Arlington. "Should I become a Catholic?" Lizz silently asked the Mother of God. An answer rose swift and sure in Lizz's heart: "Yes." Through tear-filled eyes she looked at Ryan and saw he was weeping too. When they had left the church, she asked him why. "I asked Mary if you should become a Catholic," he replied. "She said, 'Yes.'"

Lizz Lovett came into the Church at the Easter Vigil in March 2005 and died a holy death on 2 July 2016. Five days later her funeral was held in Portland. Her death and burial bookended Independence Day, holiday of America's freedom. The timing was prophetic, Father Paul Scalia noted in his homily, for in her dying Lizz Lovett showed us "the truth about . . . what it means to be free."

Here in Oregon, the first state to legalize physician-assisted suicide, the law leads us to think that freedom means being able to do whatever we choose, even if we choose to end our own life.



Lizz Lovett could have made that choice; to fend off cancer's merciless progression she could have hastened the hour of her death. Instead, she graciously took her dying in hand and made a last gift of it to others, as can be seen in her moving video testimony on the Real Life Catholic website about the meaning she found in her suffering.

It was clear to her many visitors that Lizz was somehow gaining, not losing, freedom as death drew near—a deepening freedom to be herself for others to the very end. She never forgot that from first breath to last her life was a gift, that she had been bought at a price, that she was not her own. "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free," St. Paul says, reminding us of Jesus' words in the Gospel of John: ". . . if the Son sets you free, 'you will be free indeed.'"

To those who accompany us on our last journey we can leave behind no greater gift than a courageous acceptance of death. I met Lizz Lovett only once, for just a few minutes; but in that brief time she gave me the gift of her

freedom to die as a Christian. When my hour comes and yours, I hope we are blessed to remember the lesson she taught us so well.