

1995

Advent Devotional "Everlasting Father"

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Recommended Citation

Granade, S. Ray, "Advent Devotional "Everlasting Father"" (1995). *Creative Works*. 15.
https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/creative_work/15

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Advent Devotional, 1995
EVERLASTING FATHER
Isaiah 9:6

I remember grandfather Granade as a child remembers: a small figure in a bed that loomed over me in the semi-darkness. He was ill—had been ill forever, so far as I knew—and we made numerous trips from Evergreen “over home” to Leroy. I remember the trips and riding and sleeping on the package ledge beneath the rear window of our '49 Ford; I remember seeing him only this once, being lifted from the floor by my father so that I could see and be touched by him. Searching my memory, I find him my introduction to death.

As we gathered at the home place through the years, I never connected my grandparents' deaths with anything. Death was rare and isolated. Life went on as I played with cousins while the adults talked and as we ate the communal meals that holidays bring. I remember a brief time before the third grade when I thought death might take me; based on nothing organic, the fear soon vanished as an active concern.

Death intruded more frequently as I aged. The Southern tradition of processing by the open coffin for a last look before the service impressed me mightily. Still, the increased incidence of funerals did not erase their remoteness. My small immediate family and the parts of my extended family with which I spent time seemed charmed, immune to aging. Death did not come for us, not even my pets.

Two incidents during high school brought death closer. A schoolmate rounded a curve on his motorcycle at high speed and met a car head-on. The other incident lacked the drama of the first. Older cousins were

marrying and in a context I can no longer remember, my father remarked "It's hard to realize that we're now the older generation." College, graduate school and finally a job took me farther and farther from home and the extended family to which I had once been close. The older generation began to die off.

I became a father twice, and recently my elder son's marriage lengthened my roll-call of children. Fatherhood made me more aware of mortality and more acutely conscious of Scriptural characterizations of God as father and us as His children. Those verses I had contemplated from a child's angle now seemed infinitely different. Words from a friend and my father regretting the end of "active" fathering and opportunities now forever gone accentuated that difference.

Two years ago I faced my father's mortality. A "routine procedure" became bypass surgery and I flew toward Montgomery not knowing the outcome. I've paid more attention to his aging lately, rather clinically noting the signs. His head dodders a little, his memory isn't as sharp as formerly, and increasing eye trouble threatens the sight in his right one.

When a friend lost his last parent, we discussed that loss. Realization of their full lives did not ease death's finality. He noted, in words echoed in *Pigs in Heaven*, that he had lost his youth; no one now alive retained it in their memory. I dread losing my father, as we all must if we live long enough. He remembers more than my youth. I've always been able to count on his sound advice and helping hand. He's always treated me as befit my age, though he admits that I'll always be "his little boy."

What does it mean that God is the "everlasting father?" My father's father, father, children, and I share

the same Father. I can trust my own life, childlike, to Him. I can also trust my own children—and theirs—to their “other father.”

Ray Granada