

# Little Boxes

Next month it will be 18 years since my husband died. His slippers are still under my bed, love notes and mementos are in my closet, pictures are around the house, but most of his “stuff” is gone. He taught nuclear engineering and spent thousands of hours in research filling up notebooks and file cabinets with his work but most of what he spent his life on went out to university archives in little boxes shortly after his death.

I’ve been thinking about this a lot lately as we went through mom’s things after she died and got another relative’s house ready for sale as he went into a nursing home.

Mom was always a snappy dresser and certain outfits brought back memories as we looked through them. We chuckled about how organized she was as we cleaned out drawers where most everything was neatly placed or labeled. Even knee hi hose had their individual cubbies. Most of her clothes and accessories went to Dress for Success. Her secretary desk went to my sister; her dining room table, to my daughter; chests of drawers to a grandchild; and other items are being divided up among family. Soon someone else will be living in her condo and the rose bushes we planted and she carefully nurtured will be theirs.

The relative going to the nursing home loved model trains and he had a large basement room filled with his intricate lay-out. It had to be disassembled and sold. Except for a few trains that were given to grandchildren someone else is enjoying what he spent so many hours collecting and building.

When there’s a natural disaster where lives are at stake people count themselves blessed to have survived. Their home and possessions might have been destroyed, but they’re still here. In the grand scheme of things, “things” really aren’t that important. So why do we cling to them? Why do people continue to water lawns in the midst of a dangerous California drought?

Buy another outfit when their closet is overflowing or get an even larger television set that they don’t need?

My guess is that many of us make choices based on the mistaken belief that our worth is based on how we appear or what we possess. Our culture certainly feeds into this. Pope Francis is calling us to a different way as

he encourages us to be counter-cultural in our care for the earth and each other. And he leads by example.

One of my favorite photos of him shows him blessing someone with the caption “the sleeve says it



all.” The head of the Catholic Church, the Vicar of Christ on earth is wearing a frayed cassock. He’s more concerned about putting showers in Vatican City bathrooms so that the homeless can bathe or reaching out to someone on the fringes than he is about how he’s dressed.

And he’s inviting us to do the same in his latest encyclical on the environment. We are to be good stewards, not hoarders, to reuse and recycle, to be open and aware that we are part of the larger human family—that we are all brothers and sisters and no one’s desire should take precedence over another’s need.

It’s not the way we are accustomed to thinking, but it’s the way that Jesus calls us to be. “Don’t be anxious,” Jesus tells us often. “Trust me. I love you more than you can imagine and I know what you need. Trust, don’t grasp. Closed hands cannot receive.”

So hold your “things” lightly. They’re yours only for a time and they ultimately go out in little boxes.

—Angela Anno, *Pastoral Associate*

*(photo taken from Internet)*