

Remembering the life of Jorge Luis Fuentes
Homily given by The Rev. Timothy E. Crellin
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Good morning. My name is Tim Crellin, and I'm the vicar here at St. Stephen's, and a friend of the Ramos-Fuentes family for more than twenty years. On behalf of Jorge's family, I want to thank all of you for being here today. This has been a terrible week, and the opportunity to gather together to grieve and also to celebrate the life of our friend and brother is extremely important as we seek healing. There's been an unbelievable outpouring of calls and emails as the news of Jorge's death has spread. I became aware, as the week went by, just how many lives Jorge touched. Through his work here, through school, through ROTC, through mission trips, Jorge knew a lot of people and had a lot of friends, and I know the amazing turnout last night and this large gathering today represents only part of the community of care and concern and sorrow.

Mirna and Carmelo, Jonathan, Jasmany and Alcimaris, I hope that in the midst of your pain, you can absorb some of the love that has been gathered around you today. We all loved Jorgie, and we love you. As much as I can't believe that Jorge is never going to walk into my office, flop down in the chair with that wry smile on his face, and start a great conversation again, I know that your sense of loss is far greater. We are here for you today and in the days to come. Mirna, we are all amazed and inspired by your strength.

On Sunday, a little boy from our congregation came to church with his mom. Eliaz is a little guy who reminds me a bit of Jorge at that age. And he was devastated. After the service, he sat here in the church in my lap and looked at a photo of Jorge and wept. He loved Jorge – Jorge who had been a mentor and role model to him through our youth programs for years. Looking into the face of that child, and trying to find something to say to ease his pain was one of the most difficult things I've ever had to do. My already broken heart broke a little bit more. It says so much about Jorge, the kind of person he was, that he had built a real relationship with this little boy. Jorge saw Eliaz – he made him feel special and important. He wasn't too cool or too big to be friends with a seven year old. That was a gift that Jorge had, and it hurts to have that taken away.

I found a picture last week – one of many pictures of Jorge that have come in as part of this amazing outpouring of grief and remembrance. This picture was taken on Easter Sunday about ten or eleven years ago when he was about the same age as Eliaz. Jorge, along with Carmelo, Jonathan and Jasmany are standing in front of the church, dressed in their best clothes, and Jorge is holding a pink Easter basket and making the most unpleasant face possible. The photo really captures the Jorge we knew back in those days. He was a sweetheart, but he wanted to be a bad boy. I know he gave his mom a lot of headaches, and certainly tried the patience of everyone on our staff and probably his teachers at school, too.

But you know, no one ever gave up on Jorge, no matter how much trouble he gave us. We all loved him just as he was. I think we all saw the spark. We all saw the potential. And as people have reacted this week to his death, the word potential has been used again and again. Everyone saw in him a bright, gifted young man with a huge personality and a promising future.

All the years of investment – all the love, the patience, the guidance that so many people provided were about to pay off. Jorge had avoided the pitfalls that swallow up too many of our kids, and the Lord was leading him on right pathways. He had graduated from high school, and was planning to join the Marines. He had grown up all the way through our programs here and had served with distinction as a lead counselor this summer at our BSAFE site in Uphams Corner – a position normally reserved for people who are 21 or over. He was filled with life and ready for a bright and promising future – as a Marine...or a chef. He would have been successful at whatever he tried.

Last Monday evening, for no reason, someone shot Jorge. I'm sure that person, that confused, disturbed individual – had no idea that by killing Jorge Fuentes, he was changing the course of history. I'm sure he had no idea that he was snuffing out a light that had only just begun to shine out into the world - that he wasn't just killing a kid from Wheatland Ave, he was hurting a great, great many people.

As Christians, our faith is founded on the story of a young man who in a short time had touched a great many lives. He was a light to the world, who brought love and peace and healing to many people. He had a special ability to connect with people and to see who they really were. He was a son, whose life was ended much too early by people who had no idea what they were doing, who were threatened by his goodness and by his vision. And I believe that the death of that young man, Jesus, broke his father's heart.

As much as it may be comforting to believe that Jorge's death was somehow part of God's plan – that God had a reason for it, I actually believe that it wasn't. I can't believe that this is ever what God wanted for Jorge, or for his family. This should never have happened. It should never happen to any young person or any family. Jorge was spreading his wings and about to take flight, and that's what God wanted for him. A fulfilling, happy life – a long life during which Jorge would have touched many more lives and made the world a better place.

Just as God sent Jesus here to save the world and had to watch, heartbroken, as other humans killed him, I'm sure that God's heart broke as this son died. If anything, we can take comfort in knowing that God understands our pain. If there's any consolation, it's that God shares with us, shares with Mirna because God watched his own son die. This is why Paul could write with such confidence to the Christians in Rome (8:38-39): “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rules, nor things present, nor things to come...nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ.” God is here with us, in every moment, because Christ was one of us.

This is good news, in the face of tragedy. But it might not feel like enough good news. I've been doing this work for many, many years, and I've worked with Jorge for many, many years. It's hard not to feel hopeless at a time like this. If someone like Jorge could die in this awful way, how could there be any good news? Well, my sister and brothers, the truth is that we have to be the good news. You and I – this community – we have to be the good news. God does not allow us to get stuck in despair. After Jesus died, his movement for renewal was reduced to almost nothing. God's great plan for reconciliation was down to a handful of sad, hurting, confused people who had just watched their hero die.

And after a little bit of time, with the help of the Holy Spirit, that community rallied, and they came together, and they carried their surprising new message about resurrection, about God's power over the evil we humans are capable of, and they became the good news.

Our grief on this day may be too deep, our pain too fresh and sharp, our sense of hopelessness too pronounced, to imagine ourselves as the vanguard of a movement for change, just as it was too much for the traumatized disciples in those first dark days after the death of Christ. Healing takes time. But before long, the disciples banded together. They rallied, they dreamed, they worked, they sacrificed, they built the church. They made sense out of the senseless by taking action. They brought the message of hope to the world.

This is our charge, as we move forward from this day, carrying Jorge's spirit. I believe we are called by this tragedy to a holy struggle. We are called to work together to end suffering, to end oppression, to create a society where young men can't get guns and don't kill each other, where no one goes hungry, where everyone has an equal chance, where we build better schools instead of bigger jails, where no one is rejected because no one is reject-able, where the promises of the kingdom take shape and break into our reality. We are challenged, like Mary in the Gospel for today (Jn. 11:21-27), to believe before we have seen. We are asked to believe in the kingdom before it has come in its fullness, when it still seems impossible that it could ever come, and to offer ourselves as God's partners in making it real.

For Jesus, God's son, Easter followed Good Friday because of the power of God. For Jorge, God's son, Easter will follow Good Friday as we raise him up, in our hearts, in our lives, and as we work together in his name to make a different world.

You see, God is a God of transformation. God worked in Jorge, transforming him from a little boy with a pink Easter basket and a bad attitude, into a responsible, generous, beautiful young man with so much to give. And God can work in us, transforming our hurt and grief and anger into a force for good, empowering us to make sense of the senseless by taking action.

Jorge's death is a terrible tragedy. But his death does not have to be in vain. Jorge's death could lead us to save society from its sins of racism and economic injustice. We could look back years from now and say, "It was Jorge's death that woke us up, turned us around, turned us into disciples who are willing to stand up and say, "No more! Enough is enough! The time has come for change." And when I say this, I'm not talking just to the adults but very much to the young people who are here. Jorge was a leader in his community, and his example should inspire each one of you to step up and work to make your schools and your communities better. You can be part of that change.

We are going to work together – with young people and churches and our civic leaders and with Jorge's family. We are going to work together to make sure that Jorge's death is not just another statistic in the sad history of violence in our city, but rather a turning point. Last week, Boston.com listed the homicides in the city so far this year. At #35 was "unknown male," aged 19, killed at 57 Wheatland Ave. No, my sisters and brothers. No! This was not a statistic. This was not an unknown male. This was Jorge Luis Fuentes, our friend, our son, our brother, our co-worker. A very well-known, well-loved young man who was just as comfortable talking to a city councilor or a bishop as he was to a seven year old child, who loved his family, loved

his community, and wanted to serve his country. We can never let go of that truth about Jorge – we can never let him be just the 35th homicide in Boston in 2012. It is horrible that he died, but it is so good that he lived, and we will honor his life by our witness and our work.

Those who saw the shooting happen on Monday night say that when shots were fired, Jorge's first instinct was to try to save the other young man who was sitting next to him, pushing him up the stairs and into the house. On Tuesday, the day after he died, as we were all reeling from the shock, Jorge's organs were harvested, because he had registered as an organ donor. Even as we sit here today, others have a new chance at life because of Jorge's final generous gift. He was a hero. He is a hero. He will be terribly missed, and never forgotten. Let us all work together to make sure his legacy is a better city, and a better world.

Rest in peace, Jorge, and may we *never* rest until there is justice and peace. Amen.