

All of us are here today to mourn Ralphie's loss; to celebrate his life; and most importantly to celebrate his New Life, Eternal Life, with the Lord forever in heaven – which is what this Mass of Resurrection is all about. As people of faith, we know and believe that Ralphie is home in heaven with his beloved dad, Ralph Caso, Sr., the former Nassau County Executive; Ralphie's Uncle George who was his godfather, (and his wife Ginny), Aunt Caroline Giaquinto, his godmother, and all who preceded him into the Kingdom of heaven.

I didn't know Ralphie, but I've had the privilege of knowing Grace and members of the Milone Family for some 40+ years. Yet this week, I learned a lot about how the life of Ralph George Caso, Jr. positively influenced the life of others, even though his entire life was filled with many struggles!

And that's why I chose the Gospel passage we just heard from St. Luke for today's Mass. This was the Gospel used last weekend at every Catholic Church throughout the world – on the Feast of The Holy Family, the day after Ralphie died, his first Sunday in heaven. In this Gospel, Mary and Joseph discover that their son "remained behind." That's the phrase used in the text. They truly believed that they "lost" him. And this caused them "great anxiety." This is the story of the Fifth Joyful Mystery. All the "mysteries" of the Rosary begin with some question, or doubt or suffering that leads to new discoveries and the unfolding, of new life beneath the struggle in the midst of the journey. Mary's question to Jesus is really a question that all of us pose to God at certain points of our lives: "God **why** have you done this to us?" Why has this happened – in **this** way, God? Why has my Son "remained behind?" Why am I convinced he's lost?

St. Luke says Mary and Joseph "did not understand" the reason God (in the Person of Jesus) gave to them. "Didn't you know" (the words of Jesus) that there must be meaning and a purpose to every life in God's household? Mary & Joseph "didn't understand." Nevertheless, their son, went down with them to Nazareth and was obedient to them and he grew in wisdom, age and favor – before God and man. We're here today because we know the rest of that story. Jesus did grow "in wisdom, age and grace." And, like all of us, he had many struggles and he suffered the Cross. Yet from that Cross – came the mystery of New Life - Eternal Life.

I'd like to suggest that because of (**not despite**) Ralph's disabilities the mystery of "new life" was very much a part of Ralphie's life. Two stories that I learned this week underscore that reality!

RALPHIE WAS DIAGNOSED AT HIS BIRTH in 1957 WITH TUBEROUS-SCLEROSIS A DISEASE THAT AFFECTS THE BRAIN. IN 1968, WHEN RALPH WAS ONLY 9 YEARS OLD, HE WAS AT A SUMMER CAMP. AND ONE OF THE LEADERS AT THIS CAMP MADE A COMMENT THAT A DISABLED CHILD SHOULD NOT BE IN THIS CAMP. RALPH, SR., HEARING THIS, DECIDED TO OPEN UP A CAMP FOR DISABLED CHILDREN, THUS FOUNDING CAMP ANCHOR (WHICH THIS PAST AUGUST 2018 PROUDLY CELEBRATED 50 YEARS SERVING THOUSANDS OF DISABLED CHILDREN ACROSS LONG ISLAND.

For many years, I've known kids (especially from Rockville Centre) that volunteered to work at Camp Anchor and their lives were greatly changed as a result of that opportunity and experience. And many of us know "special needs kids" who have significantly benefited from the mission of Camp Anchor. Camp Anchor has become "an anchor" on Long Island. There would be no "Camp Anchor" if Ralph George Caso, Jr. did not come into this world! Camp Anchor "remains behind" as Ralphie goes forward into God's presence.

So, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's Work?" At first, Mary and Joseph "did not understand" but the whole family grew in the mission of "wisdom, age and favor – before God and man." What a beautiful testament OF GOD'S PURPOSE (using Ralph, Sr. and Grace) BRINGING THIS SPECIAL BOY INTO THE WORLD AND HOW HIS LEGACY (the holy mission of the **family** legacy) WILL CONTINUE TO BRING JOY AND HAPPINESS TO MANY "SPECIAL NEEDS YOUNGSTERS" FOR YEARS TO COME !!! Wow!

A second illustration about the mission and value of Ralphie's life is this: WHEN RALPH WAS FIVE, GRACE AND RALPH, SR. WANTED MORE CHILDREN BUT WERE ADVISED THAT THEY COULD HAVE ANOTHER CHILD BORN WITH THIS GENE DEFECT. THEY CHOSE ADOPTION AND ALONG CAME JOLISA WHO SAID THAT IF IT WERE NOT FOR HER BROTHER BEING A SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD SHE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD THE WONDERFUL LIFE THAT WAS GIVEN TO HER BY HER ADOPTED PARENTS AND BIG BROTHER.

AT AGE 6, RALPH ATTENDED THE PROGRAM AHRC (THE ASSOCIATION FOR THE HELP OF RETARDED CHILDREN) and JOLISA EVENTUALLY TOOK A JOB THERE BECAUSE OF RALPH. AND JOLISA SAYS IT WAS THE MOST REWARDING JOB SHE HAS EVER HAD AND IT WAS ALL BECAUSE OF RALPH.

*“Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?”* Mary and Joseph *“kept all these things”* in their hearts and **eventually did understand** that there was a **purpose** (a grand purpose and meaning) for their son, even though at first it seemed like he “remained behind” and they questioned – *“why have you done this to us?”*

RALPH, SR. TAUGHT RALPHIE A PRAYER WHEN HE WAS VERY LITTLE AND UNTIL RECENTLY, RALPHIE ALWAYS SAID IT BEFORE ALL MEALS AND BEFORE GOING TO BED:

→“DEAR GOD, MAKE ME WELL, MAKE ME WHOLE!  
AND GOD BLESS MOMMY & DADDY,  
RALPH CASO, JR.”  
EXACTLY LIKE THAT, → INCLUDING HIS NAME !

Beautiful! “Make me well and make me whole.” Ralphie's life brought “wholeness” and meaning to the lives of many others. And that's what we celebrate at this Mass today. All through these years, Grace, you, like Mary, have been the conduit through which your son's life gave meaning to the family and many others beyond the Caso family circle! Your mission of devotion and family love is what we also celebrate and highlight at this Mass today **validating that all lives matter!** ... And maybe it's no coincidence that Cousin Joe Milone, who was buried this past Monday out of St. Agnes in Rockville Centre – used to visit Ralphie every Thursday afternoon at Meadowbrook Care Center. Now – they are both “well and whole” in the Father's House, together with Ralph Sr. Yes, Ralph George Caso, Jr. brought many people together.

Grace & Jolisa, all of us hope that our shared faith will give you confidence that Ralphie is finally at peace, “well and whole“ for sure and forever in the Father's House. And we pray, that both of you (like Mary & Joseph) will continue to “**find**” Ralphie anew in your prayer, and in this Temple, this place where he was baptized, each time you come to the altar for Mass. As people of faith we know from the ritual of the church → *“that we will see Ralphie again, when the love of Christ, which conquers all things destroys even death itself.”* In the meantime, when you are looking and longing for him – your son and brother will be interceding for you from above, and **you will find him** in your hearts and in the Temple.

GRACE ASKED THAT MENTION BE MADE THAT SHE OWES A GREAT AMOUNT OF GRATITUDE TO HER NIECE, DR. GINA CASO, WHO WAS A CONSTANT IN GUIDING THE FAMILY ON RALPH'S CARE, GOING INTO HOSPITALS WHEN NEEDED. ALSO THELMA, HIS CARETAKER, WAS VERY IMPORTANT TO THEM FOR THE GREAT KINDNESS SHE GAVE RALPH OVER THE YEARS.

I would now like to invite Dr. Joseph Metz, Ralphie's cousin by marriage to offer some “words of remembrance,” as requested by Grace. ....

*Msgr. Frank Caldwell*