

Finding an intercessor in Michael Kniffin



“Michael ... drew together a beautiful community whose common thread was love for him and dedication to his well-being. His gentle spirit also created a safe space when his brothers and sisters were having a tough day. Cozying up next to Michael set the troubles of the world at bay, and no one was better than Michael at keeping secrets.”

That’s how the Kniffin family remembered their nearly 10-year-old, Michael Patrick, who died on the last day of 2021. Days after the feast of the Holy Family, his parents, Bonnie and Eric, and his seven siblings were one modern holy family living the [Passion, Death and Resurrection during Christmastide.](#)

They are quite certain their son has been embraced into the arms of God the Father. Michael was diagnosed with lissencephaly, a severe congenital neurological condition known as “smooth brain.” His family wrote: “Michael’s condition left him nonverbal, nonmobile and legally blind. But his heart was perfect.”

He wasn’t expected to live as long as he did, and he was clearly a blessing in the lives of those he touched. I know that’s true, as I got to know Michael over social media. As some of us from afar prayed with the community of love around Michael and his family – via livestream (sometimes it’s a blessing) – we were invited by the family to give our intentions to Michael to lift up to God. His parents implored: “St. John the Apostle records in [Revelation] 8:4 that he saw ‘the smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascend up before God from the hand of the angel.’”

The invitation continued: "If your faith permits, we invite you to ask our Michael to join you in lifting these petitions, and whatever else is on your heart, up to the heavenly throne. We are already finding him a powerful intercessor!"

That's Christians believing in what we say we do. That's the kind of love that is in union with the Trinity. I'm reminded of a friend who has children who were all adopted out of foster care with extreme trauma, most of whom have severe [mental illnesses](#) (such as schizophrenia, for one). How do you parent with that reality? By surrendering entirely to God. You love as he's called you, with the full knowledge that he loves them even more than you do. Even in their pain, this is what the Kniffins are showing us.

"We ask our dear saint Michael to pray for us, that God would keep fresh in our hearts all that he taught us through Michael's quiet life, that we would all love God so that we may be together with Michael in God's presence, and that [God would be glorified through Michael's life](#) and story. ... Michael had profound limitations, but had a beautiful ability to draw the best out of other people," the family remembered.

Apparently, Michael had a magnificent laugh: "Michael reserved his biggest laughs for the smallest things, which made his joy all the more wondrous: the way light sparkled off an iridescent poster board, the feeling of a string brushing across his forehead, or the sound of wind chimes. ... Finding ways to make Michael laugh was like a puzzle that his siblings were always thrilled to solve."

In more recent years, his seizures and other sufferings made his smile and laughter less frequent. (He received medication 10 times a day.)

"His limits required us to quiet ourselves, and to look closely for the smallest indications that he was tired, happy or that he had enough of the sun," his family wrote.

Michael's life was worth living. We live in a country that doesn't know that. May Michael intercede for the voiceless innocents whose parents are making decisions right now in the face of [prenatal tests](#) and all kinds of pressures to abortion.

We spend a lot of time in life, in our culture, trying to prevent/run from suffering – so much so that when it comes, we don't know what to do with it. The Kniffins, in their pain, point the way. Please pray for them and all families who love in the midst of extreme suffering, in union with Our Lord, who lived and died and rose to give the gift of himself for eternity.

Kathryn Jean Lopez is a senior fellow at the National Review Institute and editor-at-large of National Review.