

A Time to Reflect...

In my life I have grown to dislike the phrase “he’s/she’s taken a turn for the worst.” Every time I hear it I think back to a day when the superior at the Novitiate came to me and used those words. By the time I arrived home my father had died. I can still remember the feelings I had and that was many years ago. I use this episode in my life as an example that grief over someone dying never really leaves. It may change and we can find some peace with it as time goes on but it never leaves us. Looking at a picture, remembering a birthday, visiting a grave, celebrating the anniversary of death can trigger our grief. Dealing with this grief is what bereavement is all about. It is a part of death but it is surely a part of life. For Catholics there are three things that are important to remember in this process.

First is that through **our Baptism** we enter into the very life of God through our connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus. We become children of God, and therefore beloved by God. Symbols present when we were baptized are part of our funeral ritual...sprinkling with holy water, a white garment (pall), the sign of the cross first made on us at baptism, and the Paschal candle remind us of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Second is the **hope of the resurrection**. This hope is the reason why we come together to pray for the deceased. Presumption is taking our salvation for granted and feeling that there is no need to pray. Despair is saying that there is no hope for us so there is also no need to pray. The God who loves us enough to send his only Son has promised us participation in eternal life and he has given us this life to prepare. Our hope in this promise brings us, at times, to ask God for forgiveness and keeps us going each day.

Third is that **the mass** is the actual celebration of the death and resurrection of Jesus, his Paschal Mystery. At mass we remember and celebrate what Jesus has done and continues to do for us. For us as Catholics there is no higher celebration! When we are going to pray for someone who has died, we go directly to the source of our life by praying and celebrating at mass. St. Monica told her son Augustine to please remember her at the altar (mass).

I had a friend who lost her son a few years ago. He was a generous person but like all of us he had his faults and could have been more faithful to his various obligations in life. While in the hospital he received the Sacrament of the Anointing and seemed to be prepared for what was ahead. When it came time to plan his funeral she did not want to have a mass since he did not go regularly to mass. I tried to persuade her, her family tried to persuade her, but she was adamant. I was ready to leave his judgment in the hands of God who knows us better than we know ourselves. Pope Francis made famous the phrase “Who am I to judge” and that is what I believed. My friend’s decision stayed firm and so we had a service in the funeral home instead of a mass. It was a sad time for me. I think it really hindered me from grieving in a way that would have been helpful. It also would have been a more helpful prayer for the deceased as well as for his brothers and sisters.

~Fr. Rich O'Leary, OSA