



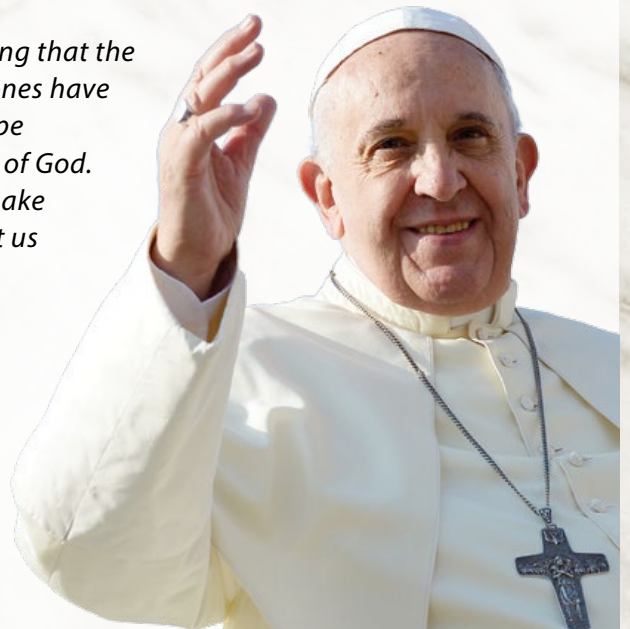
“ **DEATH** looms before us like a great door. It is awesome because it is larger than any other reality we ever face. It sums up all that has been and brings to an end all that might be yet to happen. It is a great and silent door. But for the person of faith, it becomes an inviting mystery.”¹



LIFE IS CHANGED, NOT ENDED

Bereavement & Grief in the Catholic Tradition

“ **WE CAN CONSOLE** one another in this faith, knowing that the Lord has conquered death once and for all. Our dear ones have not disappeared into the darkness of nothingness: hope assures us that they are in the good and strong hands of God. Love is stronger than death. Therefore, the way is to make love grow, to render it more solid, and love will protect us until the day in which every tear will be wiped away, when “death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more” (Rev 21:4). If we let ourselves be sustained by this faith, the experience of bereavement can generate a stronger solidarity of family bonds, a new openness to the sorrow of other families, a new fraternity with the families that are born and reborn in hope.”²





THE PASSING of a loved one is one of the deepest losses that we will ever experience. Although its inevitability is a reality, it does not make the grief experienced any easier. Grief touches each and every one of us in one way or another. It can touch us through the death of a loved one, whether a parent, a spouse, a sibling, a friend, a child, a relative - even the death of someone we did not know personally but yet we knew about them.

Grief is also experienced through other forms of loss: the disintegration of a friendship, the discovery of infertility for a couple hoping to conceive, leaving behind a well-established life to relocate elsewhere, the breakdown of a marriage, the separation of one's parents, and the hurt experienced in a troubled relationship.



WHAT IS GRIEF?

GRIEF is a normal and healthy reaction to loss, in any form.

The word *bereavement* is taken from the ancient Germanic root word meaning "to rob" or "to be torn apart".³ When a loved one dies, our whole world shatters – life as we know it has changed – and a deep emotional wound is left open. Grief is the process by which the healing of that wound can take place.⁴ It is the process by which life can be lived again – when memories of our loved one are no longer deeply painful.⁵

There are 5 elements in the grieving process⁶

- Accepting the reality of the loss
- Experiencing the pain
- Remembering the person through memories

- Adjusting to life without the physical presence of the person
- Finding new meaning in life

Allowing ourselves to go through the process of grieving is not a sign that we have stopped thinking about or loving the person. It allows us to deal with and live life without them, in a peaceful way, focused on the present moment, and seeing with a hopeful heart and mind the future ahead.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:....A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance." (Ecc 3:1,4)

"At the death of a Christian, whose life of faith was begun in the waters of Baptism and strengthened at the Eucharistic table, the Church intercedes on behalf of the deceased because of its confident belief that death is not the end, nor does it break the bonds forged in life. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting Word of God and the Sacrament of the Eucharist."

(Order of Christian Funerals, no. 4)

COPING WITH GRIEF

IT IS VITAL to seek the comfort and support of loved ones, family and friends during this time. Tears can heal. *"The right to weep should not be denied. We must weep in mourning. Jesus also 'wept' and was 'profoundly moved' by the death of Lazarus and the mourning of a family he loved (Jn 11:33-37)."*⁷ According to Jewish folklore, God offered Adam and Eve, and their descendants, the gift of tears as consolation to ease their self-inflicted suffering of being cast out of the Garden of Eden.

*"Although it is accompanied by intense emotions, grief itself is not a feeling. It is a process, a slow journey toward acceptance and peace. And it is a hard journey, a long letting go of someone who was important to you in more ways than you have yet fully realised."*⁸

When our grief is accompanied by such emotions as sorrow, loneliness, anger, guilt, self-pity or helplessness, it is tempting to try to suppress it. But we should not do so. Grief will always, without fail, return to eventually be dealt with in the future, oftentimes rearing its head in a more challenging way than the initial experience. *"Facing the pain, on the other hand, allows you to work through it, to admit to yourself how deeply your loss runs. Only then can you gradually ease your grip on the past and face the life ahead of you with restored energy and, yes, happiness."*⁹

A Christian is called to *comfort the sorrowful* and to *pray for the living and the dead* – these are two of the **Spiritual Works of Mercy**. We should never let embarrassment prevent us from expressing our condolences to those who mourn. It is important to ask how they are and let them know that we are praying for them and for the soul of their loved one.

"Not only time can bring healing by itself. Grief also needs proper treatment – understanding, patience, and compassion."¹⁰

PRAYER

"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save." (Ps 34:18)

"WHY, GOD?" When a loved one dies, the struggle to accept what has happened and the enormity of the loss can lead to feelings of grief, anger, bewilderment, betrayal and abandonment. We struggle to accept the reality of death and to understand how God could allow this to happen, and can even feel abandoned by Him. God's Word assures us that He is close to us in these moments and longs to comfort us when we cry out to Him. *"Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to thee! Do not hide thy face from me in the day of my distress! Incline thy ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call!"* (Ps 102:1-2)

Prayer is our response to loss and grief. However we can sometimes feel like it is too difficult to pray – that our hearts are too heavy with grief to lift up to God. The best way to pray, then, is to place ourselves in the Presence of God and just be with Him, allowing the Holy Spirit to pray through us. The Psalms are a comforting form of prayer during times of sorrow.

*"Don't run away from death. Don't fight death. And when death is stealing someone close to you, for heaven's sake, pray. Pray long, pray well, pray even desperately, pray from the depths of your heart."*¹¹

Spend time in Eucharistic Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Here Jesus is present – sit in His Presence, speak with Him, pray to Him and ask for healing. Through the intimacy of prayer, we discover that *"the darkness of death is confronted with a more intense work of love."*¹²



THE CHURCH HELPS US TO GRIEVE

FUNERAL MASS OR MASS OF CHRISTIAN BURIAL (I.E. REQUIEM MASS)

The Church offers this beautiful liturgy to every Catholic who has died, even if he or she has been away from the Church for a long time. The Church gathers with the family and friends of the deceased person to praise God for Christ's victory over death and to entrust the deceased to God's love and mercy. The Mass of Christian Burial is not only an expression of grief, but a profound act of worship.

RITE OF COMMITTAL (BURIAL OR CREMATION SERVICE)

This is the last act of the Church in caring for the body of our loved one who has died. In committing the body to its grave or place of interment, we express the hope, as a community of faith, that the body of the person we love now awaits the Resurrection.

MEMORIAL MASSES

Offered on special days such as anniversary of death, birthdays, and other special occasions, including the month of November, which is devoted to praying for and remembering the dead with the Feasts of All Saints (Nov 1st) and All Souls (Nov 2nd), and special intentions for the dead during all Masses.

WAKE OR VIGIL SERVICE

A cherished Catholic tradition is the wake the evening before the Funeral Mass. Catholics gather together to "keep vigil" with the family in prayer for their loved one who has passed from this world. The Vigil Service can take the form of readings from Scripture, the Office of the Dead from the Liturgy of the Hours, and the singing of hymns. A much-loved tradition is the recitation of the Holy Rosary, entrusting our loved one to Mary, with sure hope and confidence in her maternal love and intercession for their soul.

CATHOLIC TEACHING

"The Christian meaning of death is revealed in the light of the Paschal mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ in whom resides our only hope. The Christian who dies in Christ Jesus is *"away from the body and at home with the Lord."*¹³

PRAYERS FOR THE DEAD

Prayers of Remembrance – may take place on special days that are significant in the life of the loved one who has died, or the family.

Novena for the Holy Souls.

RECOURSE TO DIVINE MERCY DEVOTION

The Year of Mercy was also announced by Pope Francis on Divine Mercy Sunday 2015 and will conclude on the Feast of Christ the King in November 2016, *"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"*. (cf. Lk 6:36)

LIGHTING CANDLES

One of the oldest Catholic traditions.

Lighting a votive or prayer candle (a small candle intended as a votive offering to God in gratitude) in memory of a loved one in church or at home is an act of Christian prayer. As at the Easter Vigil, when the priest lights the Easter Candle representing Christ as the Light of the World, we too light candles in prayer for others to signify our unity with Christ, as His Body, the Church. *"God is light, and in him there is no darkness"*. (1 Jn. 1:5)

VISITING A LOVED ONE'S GRAVE

When someone is buried or their ashes are laid to rest, the Church blesses the ground or the crypt wherein the body is laid, thereby making it a place of reverence. The early Christians venerated the graves of their families and friends inside the catacombs,¹⁴ Europeans during medieval times sprinkled graves with holy water, and Popes visit and pray at the tombs of holy men and women. So too are we as Catholics encouraged to visit the graves of our loved ones who have died. It gives us the opportunity to honour their passing into eternity and to pray for them, wherever they may be on that journey.



SAYING GOODBYE TO GOODBYES ~ THE EUCHARIST¹⁵

THE MYSTERY of the Eucharist – Christ’s Body and Blood – made present in the bread and wine offered in the Holy Sacrifice of every single Mass, is the culmination of the very life of the Church and the world. In the Mass, wherein the celebration of the Eucharist takes place, heaven touches earth in a special way. Each time we participate in Mass, we enter into a mystery that has been celebrated since the very first Mass at the Last Supper. Most importantly we enter, in a special way, into a remembrance of Christ’s Sacrifice as if we are present at Calvary.

Within the Mass, the Church is united with God in a most holy union because it is a celebration of Christ’s victory, knowing no earthly or timely limits. Because of this, every Catholic who has been present at a Mass, has gone to the same Mass as every other Catholic. The Saints, our ancestors, family members, and friends have all been present and experienced the same Mass that we have experienced.

As such, in each and every Mass, we worship God alongside every Catholic on earth and in heaven right now. As members of the Body of Christ, despite differences in location or language, we all partake in the same mysteries of the Church together, and alongside each other, always: both here on earth and in heaven. For us, goodbyes do not exist. What a comfort this is for us – those we hold dear who have died, or who have pursued a life at a distance from us, are still present with us in the Eucharist and at every Mass. We see them in and through Christ, our Risen Lord, as Heaven touches earth in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We worship God and participate in this beautiful mystery, not alone and separated from those we have lost, but together and united with them as one Church.

“Lord, for your faithful people life is changed, not ended. When the body of our earthly dwelling lies in death we gain an everlasting dwelling place in heaven.”

(Preface from the Mass of Christian Burial)



PLANNING A CATHOLIC FUNERAL

For assistance in planning a Mass of Christian Burial for a loved one, contact your parish priest or visit the Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria:
www.catholiccemeteries.com.au/planning-a-funeral/

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

For extra support for those who are grieving, the Catholic Cemeteries & Crematoria offers a special Bereavement Consultancy Service. Contact them on 1300 114 997 (free call) or visit www.catholiccemeteries.com.au

RECOMMENDED READING

Lorene Hanley Duquin,
Grieving with the Help of Your Catholic Faith

Silas Henderson, O.S.B., (ed.),
Grieving the Loss of a Parent

C.S. Lewis,
A Grief Observed

Amy Welborn,
Wish You Were Here: Travels through Loss and Hope

¹ Benedict J. Groeschel, C.F.R., *Arise from Darkness* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 126. ² Pope Francis, General Audience 17 June 2015, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/general-audience-on-mourning-the-loss-of-a-loved-one> ³ <http://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Bereavement> (accessed 16 June 2015); and Lorene Hanley Duquin, *Grieving with the Help of Your Catholic Faith* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division, 2006), 8. ⁴ Duquin, 8. ⁵ Duquin, 8. ⁶ Taken from Duquin, 9. ⁷ Pope Francis, General Audience 17 June 2015, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/general-audience-on-mourning-the-loss-of-a-loved-one> ⁸ Carol Luebering, “Giving Yourself Permission to Grieve” in *Grieving the Loss of a Parent*, Silas Henderson (ed.) 2nd Ed. (Indiana: Abbey Press, 2013), 19. ⁹ Luebering, 20-21. ¹⁰ Luebering, 18. ¹¹ Groeschel, 121. ¹² Pope Francis, General Audience 17 June 2015, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/general-audience-on-mourning-the-loss-of-a-loved-one> ¹³ CCC, no. 1681. ¹⁴ Duquin, 47 ¹⁵ Cf. <http://lifeteen.com/blog/see-you-in-the-eucharist-no-really/> (accessed 11 June 2015)



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