

## The Best of Times The Worst of Times

In the last two years, two of my children have lost friends to deep personal tragedy. Twice, the shock of unexpected death has been compounded with the shock upon shock of violence. There was the middle school child who crashed with her family at the freeway's end in Santee; and now, the Poway angel, as her dad says, dead on an afternoon run. As the shock is slowly absorbed, grief comes. I know that eventually my teenagers will have deep questions and comments. What can I say?

My children, ages 13-17, are no strangers to loss. We often speak about the spiritual and the human aspects of loss. Over the years, our conversations have grown as they have grown. Today, in shock myself; I think I'll approach it this way:

### **Be patient with shock.**

Shock is the way we humans cope with the un-imaginable. Our world is upside down with the turn of events. Shock is the way our bodies slow down to survive. We must be patient with it. Drink life-giving water, walk in the fresh air. Remember to breathe. Talk to God.

### **Wrap Ourselves in Grief**

Grief is the spiritual equivalent of physical shock. Grief allows us to survive the loss that would kill us. The loss of love to love, the loss of deep human relationship can be strong enough to freeze our soul. The light in our soul can flicker as oxygen grows heavy and grief sweeps in to fill our void. Grief fills the void and protects the light.

Grief evolves in us through different stages or levels. In the thick of it we cannot move. And we need to stay still then. In the thick of grief, we wrap ourselves tighter towards that flicker of light in our soul. We look to the light, hold the light, and, eventually, feel the warmth of that light of creation.

As Christians, the light of soul holds the wonder of the Trinity. The passages of grief, over days and years, give the person in suffering a spiritual space that allows the Trinity room for healing mysteries. The Creator slowly feeds recognition, understanding and, someday, acceptance of the loss. The Savior stands inside, yes, inside the grief, and holds the sorrow and pain. A suffering prayer is: "Please, Lord Jesus, take this. It is too much for me." And Jesus will take it.

The Holy Spirit colors its divine self in grief and offers healing from both the inside and out. Last night, 1000 candles at Saint Michaels in Poway offered supporting love around the anguish of the parents. The world is upside down and only the holy spirit of those 1000 candles, with the knees and prayers of parents and children everywhere, brought the sun back up today in San Diego.

Grief opens us to God's healing grace. We must trust in the slow work of God both in our hearts and in our world.

## **Take Care of Our Bodies**

In shock and through grief, we need to remember to eat, sleep and exercise. Drinking water is a healing act. Emersion in water is the best. Water is healing, water is life giving.

## **Celebrate the Eucharist**

We need more Eucharist. We do not need to think about it, there is no need to intellectualize it, we just need to predispose ourselves to grace. As we carry our grief and join it to the Cross, the cross of Jesus gets larger and our suffering gets lighter.

Sitting, kneeling, singing or speaking, standing and offering the sign of peace; we offer a prayer larger than words, a prayer for the parents of lost children, a prayer for parents in shock and grief. We give prayer for all who suffer the loss of love. We are with Mary on the road to Calvary.

What do we celebrate at Mass? We celebrate the divine mystery of life and death. The shock of unexpected and violent death, as well as the shock of any and all death, has brought us to a very thin space. The very thin space between life and death, physical and spiritual, me and God is where close death takes us. The space is so thin it is hard to take a breath. And while here, we celebrate the mystery that holds joy and sorrow, love and tragedy all in the same moment. In God's time, our pain can open to wonder.

## **In Conclusion**

My Dad once told me that these are the best of times and that these are the worst of times, just as Charles Dickens wrote. My Dad told me that it was always like this from the time we left the Garden. That is what human life is, and so we can expect it. Expect the best, pass through the worst, and trust God. That is what my Dad told me and that is what I will tell my children.

This prayer attributed to Saint Patrick, himself a victim of violence, kidnapping and eight years of slavery, seems to fit well amid the news and rains of this March.

### **I arise today,**

Through the strength of heaven:  
Light of the sun, radiance of the moon.  
Splendor of fire, speed of lightning,  
Swiftness of wind, depth of sea,  
Stability of earth and firmness of rock.

I arise today,

Through God's strength to pilot me:  
God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me,  
God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me,  
God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me,  
God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me.

From the snares of devils, from temptation of vices,  
From everyone who shall wish me ill,  
Afar and near, alone and in a multitude.

**St. Patrick, 4<sup>th</sup> century Ireland.**