

Grief is An Opening

All Souls' Day

November 2, 2021

Fr. Tony Davis

There are many normal reactions to the death of a loved one- sadness, anger, uncertainty, etc. No matter how prepared we are for it, it is still hard. The most important thing, though, is to keep moving forward through the grieving process. For all those in this process now, we pray that you may find strength and courage from God to keep moving through it. It is OK to move through the grief process slowly or at your own pace. The worst thing to do, though, is to stop the process altogether.

The spiritual author Paula D'Arcy, who has been through grief and trauma personally, walks with others through their grief. She hears their pain, encourages them to grieve at their own pace, and allows them to protest the loss of a loved one. But she doesn't allow them to stop there. In her short book *Winter of the Heart: Finding Your Way Through the Mystery of Grief*, her final chapter is entitled, 'Grief is an Opening.' She believes that grief, if followed through to the end, has the ability to transform us and open us up to insights and experiences that were never possible prior to or during the early stages of our grieving process. One such insight that she gained personally is that, at the end of the day, no one is owed to her. She writes,

Grief is a reminder that life is not about trying to control everything to our liking- something that is not possible anyway. Life is about learning to hold the people and things we care about as lightly as possible until the moment when we can step back and see their real beauty. We don't own anyone, not even our

children. Everyone has his or her own destiny, and each person appears in our life as a gift. No one belongs to us. Realizing this affects the way we relate to life. We treat gifts and possessions very differently. (43)

All people, including our loved ones who have died, belong to God alone. They are not possessions, but people. In our country, we should know that anytime we treat people as possessions, things end badly. Therefore, all of our acquaintances, friendships, and relationships on this earth are pure gifts that call for gratitude, not taking them for granted. Perhaps the greatest act of love is to give them back to God when the time comes.

The message of grief opening us up is central to Christianity. It is the mystery of our faith, the Paschal Mystery: Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again. The same is true for all of us. We will live, die, and then find new life, both literally and figuratively. As St. Paul to the Romans in our second reading said, “for if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.” Grief, no matter how hard it is, will lead to resurrection if we keep moving through it.

Grief, if followed through, will open us up to something new.

As we continue with this mass, let us pray for all our beloved dead. As the book of Wisdom said in our first reading, ‘they are at peace.’ Let us also pray for ourselves, that we may learn that no one is owed to us, we own no one, and that all life belongs to God.