

“Woman, why are you weeping?” (Jn 20:13). Mary Magdalene’s reaction to the death of Jesus is one we can all relate to. In particular, I am reminded of the death of my grandmother.

Let me begin a little before the Lord reached out to call her home. A priest had come to anoint her and saw that she was not long for this world. My grandmother was laying down in the very room that I had slept in as a child. She listened to reflective music. She had rosary beads nearby as she gazed lovingly at a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus above her and to the right. Her hands were folded together as she prayed to God in a trance-like state of sheer ecstasy that the saints and mystics of the church would easily recognize. It is a state of prayer that is quite a mystery. God talks one on one and the soul listens and understands God’s way of looking and understanding. My mother tried to keep watch. Just as the apostles had drifted asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, my mother was exhausted, so she laid down for a little sleep.

I called home from the west coast at noon time, the hour in which the crucifixion began. On the east coast, the hour was already 3 p.m. The weather in Maryland was dark and stormy. We go through life not knowing the day nor the hour of our death. But in the midst of a very rare phone call between a son and his earthly father, Jesus reached down to earth and remembering the words from his own cross said, ‘Father into your hands I commend the spirit of Raffaela.’ The rains poured from heaven with tears of joy for my grandmother as she left this world to join all the saints of heaven.

In heaven they rejoiced. Here on earth, we mourned and wept. I hung up the phone and began to pray the rosary, the prayer that my grandmother inspired me to pray with but a simple smile on the last night before I left for the seminary. I began to cry as I prayed. The tears at first were tears of sorrow as I looked on the situation with earthly eyes.

I had never experienced the death of anyone so close to me. For months I feared her passing. I dreaded returning to my dormitory room for fear that I would have a message waiting for me on my answering machine, a message of death, a message of finality. Fear of death is the most elementary form of fear. None of us escape death.

My knees collapsed and I fell to the floor weeping. The sheer mystery of God is so far beyond our earthly way of comprehension that it overwhelms the mind. My tears were no longer of sorrow but of sheer incomprehension of how all-encompassing God’s love is. The Lord used the very moment of my grandmother’s death to speak to me and remind me of his love and concern for me. From 3,000 miles away, I was present by phone for the moment of death. I was comforted by my parent’s faith and understanding. I was comforted by Jesus himself reaching out to guide my grandmother from death to eternal life. Instead of the horror of a hasty message left on an answering machine, Jesus encouraged me to reach out and embrace the cross with open arms.

During the funeral, Jesus was present to comfort me again and give me the strength to honor my grandmother in words of remembrance. At the grave side on that chilly November morning, there was one final sign from heaven to punctuate the belief that my grandmother had risen to a new life. The clouds parted and a dazzling ray of light shone upon the coffin. The warmth of Christ took away the chill of the weather and the sting of death. “The Father’s compassion embraces the sufferings of all human beings and causes his Spirit to flow forth from the side of his beloved Son . . . the Spirit of Jesus permeates the death of human beings in order to give them his life.”¹

Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection was not just a onetime event. Through the Paschal Mystery, Christ is ever present in our midst, in our reality, in our time, in our moments of joy, in our moments of sorrow, and at the hour of our death. "Yes, God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not die but may have eternal life. God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16-17). We are called to carry our own crosses and imitate Christ. "The death of Jesus is the school for Christian life."ⁱⁱ

"Woman, why are you weeping?"

ⁱ Corbon, Jean. *The Wellspring of Worship*, pg. 104.

ⁱⁱ Kern, Walter. "Paschal Mystery I: Suffering and Death." *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, pg. 768.