

“Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Mt 5:4). The sorrows of life can take the wind out of our sails. In two weeks, we will celebrate Father’s Day. It will be a joyful occasion if we have a loving father whom we can celebrate the day with. Sometimes a special day like Father’s Day or Mother’s Day is an occasion for sadness because of the hurtful memories it brings up.

When my father was a high school senior, his mother passed away. He deeply loved his mother and mourned her loss. He took to journaling as a way to express his grief and to question why she died at such a young age. We do not get over a loss easily and my father journaled for two solid years. I think it was his way of praying and searching for answers from God.

A year later, he met a young woman whom he fell in love with. Although they lived far apart, on a regular basis he wrote to his new girlfriend. Despite the joy of a newfound friend, there were times when the loss of his mother crept into this relationship and he seemed to be sour on life.

They say that time heals all wounds. God is more helpful than time. My father found peace with the loss of his mother but never lost the way he had originally felt. During his life, he had a sensitivity for others when they lost someone dear to them. He went out of his way to offer them condolences and would often write a poem or letter to help them in their grief. A mother, a father, a child, a beloved cat or dog. He understood their grief and responded with compassion.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction with the encouragement with which we ourselves are encouraged by God” (2 Cor 1:3-4).

When his father passed away at the age of 80, my father had a family and four boys. My grandfather had gone to the doctor for an annual physical and gotten a good report from the doctor. To celebrate, he went out for pizza to a little shop around the corner from where he lived. He ordered the pizza but died before it was ready. We do not know the hour when the Lord will call us home, so we should always be prepared. When I was home on vacation, I came across the letters my father wrote when his own father passed away.

- To the priest who offered the funeral Mass, he wrote: “May God forever bless you as you continue your daily work. My prayers and gratitude are with you ... for your kind words are like a candle that shall forever shine in my mind, heart, and soul.”
- He thanked the pizza shop owner who went through the harrowing experience of having a customer die in his shop. “Your quick response in summoning the EMTs gives me the peace of mind that everything humanly possible was done for my father – and that truly our Lord’s will prevailed. I am also deeply grateful that he chose to be with kind friends in his final moments.”
- My father wrote to his stepmother: “With God’s help, I pray this letter will find you at peace and in good health. No one has ever found the words to express their deep sorrow __ yet I hope you will understand that my heart shares in your loss.”
- He wrote to his stepsister: “The difficult and trying times are overshadowed by the joyous and happy moments shared with loved ones. Time spent in remorse, bitterness or hatred can seem like an eternity __ but time well spent in being a good neighbor and friend are the shining examples that truly live on. Father Pagonis vividly pointed out how Pa reflected the Christian traits of the Good Samaritan.”

Made whole through God's healing touch, my father increasingly reached out to others in their sorrow and grief.

Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow him. Perhaps the more natural thing to do is to run from our cross. But if we put forth a little effort and allow God to do the heavy lifting, he will help us through whatever difficulty we may be facing and offer us the strength to help others in return. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3).