

# Grieving with Great Hope



Dear St. John Vianney Parishioner,

Please accept our heartfelt sympathy for you and your family during this difficult time of grieving the loss of your loved one. Realizing that going through the grieving process is painful, St. John Vianney's (SJV) Grief Ministry send our thoughts and prayers. During your first year of grieving the SJV Grief Team will designate an "angel" to quietly work beside you without judgment while maintaining privacy. We'll occasionally call you to listen, offering empathy and prayer. See the SJV bulletin, website and the Grief Ministry bulletin board in the SJV Church hall for upcoming events and resources. We are honored to accompany you as you embark on the challenging and hope-filled journey of grief work.

Grieving is as natural as the four seasons given to us by nature's Grand Designer—the One who upholds you and all those you love, including that person who is gone but with you still. The SJV Grief Ministry launches our quarterly *Grieving with Great Hope* newsletter starting with autumn.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional grief and suffering. For those grieving, social distancing, self-quarantining and isolating have become new realities. This issue includes a discussion of grieving during the pandemic, and what to expect during grief work, which is—*at least at first — our last act of love after your beloved has passed.* Turn to God in your sorrow; do not be afraid.

God bless and keep you,

SJV Grief Ministry Team

## WHAT TO EXPECT

**Disbelief** prevents you from accepting the truth; you expect to wake up any minute from this nightmare  
**Shock** helps temporarily; it softens the blow, leaving you dazed and numb; your emotions are frozen  
**Crying** (unexpected sobbing or quiet tears) gives you physical release and your emotions an outlet

**Physical symptoms** you may be unprepared for: overeating, oversleeping, physical aches and pains, extreme fatigue, memory problems, numbness or weakness; symptoms usually fade. See your doctor if symptoms persist.

**Denial** leads to separating fact from feelings; unable to accept death of loved one; you expect she/he to call

**Questioning** why he/she had to die; you repeatedly ask, without getting an answer to your painful cry

**Repeating** your story over and over; repeating helps you absorb the painful reality

**Self-Control** may be needed to fulfill your duties, do your job or rest from the pain; however, you need to moderate self-control as it can block your healing process



There is a sob to autumn: the sob of a loss

## GRIEF AND PRAYER

by Deacon Dennis Sullivan

Today COVID-19 finds us in interesting times with isolation from family, friends, Church and the sacraments. Lives have been turned around due to the pandemic; and now you're faced with grief from death of a spouse, child, friend, or miscarriage.

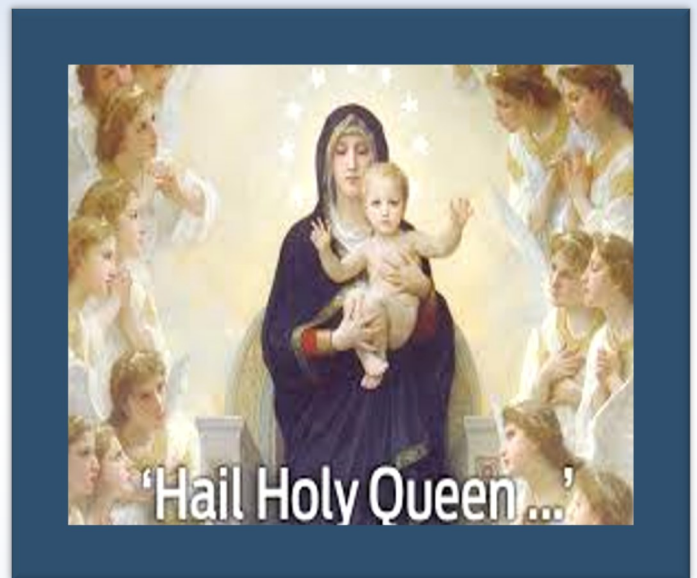
The most basic definition of Grief: "is the normal and natural emotional reaction to loss or change of any kind. Of itself, grief is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder. While this definition is accurate, it doesn't really explain what grief is. Here's another meaning used to give a better idea of what grief is, beyond the fact that it's normal: "Grief is the conflicting feelings caused by the end of or change in a familiar pattern of behavior" (A Grief Support Blog).

I found that praying to God is a way of getting through a time of grief. **PRAYER**, in the Catholic Church, is "**the raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.**" It is an act of the moral virtue of *religion*, which Catholic theologians identify as a part of the cardinal virtue of *justice* or "giving due to God." **Prayer** may be expressed vocally or mentally.

You can speak to God with your own words. You can express your anger at what has caused grief—I know, because I was truly angry at the death of my father. God will understand your feelings and loss. Then He can return His mercy and love to you. You can engage in some form of ritualistic prayer, such as the Our Father, Hail Mary, or rosary. There are a number of prayers you can say to meet your needs at a time of grief. One prayer you can depend on for healing is **Hail, Holy Queen**, because Mary will hold your prayers in her heart and deliver them to Jesus.

The author of **Hail, Holy Queen** was a German monk, Blessed Herman the lame, (1013-1054). He was left at the monastery at age seven, never to see his parents again.

Facing grief early in his life, Herman was born with serious disabilities: he could not walk, and it took him longer than most children to learn how to speak. But he had other gifts: mathematics, music and fluency in Latin, Greek, and even Arabic. Because of his own ailments, Herman was patient and compassionate. From childhood Herman cherished a special love for the Blessed Mother, so it comes as no surprise that he wrote his finest work for her. **Hail, Holy Queen** expresses beautifully our faith in the Mother of God who extends her love and mercy to all of us. ✦



### Hail, Holy Queen

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of mercy, Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.

To you we cry, the children of Eve; to you we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this land of exile.

Turn, then most gracious advocate, your eyes of mercy toward us; lead us home at last and show us the blessed fruit of your womb, Jesus: O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

The English translation of Salve, Regina (Hail, Holy Queen) from A Book of Prayers © 1982, International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL) . All rights reserved.

## TOOLS TO WEATHER GRIEF DURING THE PANDEMIC

### Reflection Rituals:

- Reach out to your family, friends, faith community (Grief Ministry “angel”) via phone, email, Zoom, etc. Seek out people who are good listeners and will allow you to share your thoughts and feelings; tell them what you need; know what tasks are most appropriate for each friend
- Link yourself with the one who died: place their picture in your purse, wallet or by your nightstand; drink from their mug or write with their pen; find *your way* to be close to them
- Your loved one’s life and death were significant so preserve keepsake memorials in a special file or box: newspaper obituary; funeral bulletin; prayer cards, notes from family and friends
- Keep a journal as you do your grief work: you decide what and how much to write; keep a notebook; date each entry in case you want to review later; record your feelings; write a letter to God or your loved one
- Create a daily ritual to remember and honor your loved one

### Spiritual Rituals:

- Lean on your Faith by trusting in God’s infinite and unfathomable love and mercy: Divine Mercy Chaplet, Rosary, read the Bible: Psalms ..., watch EWTN, search [www.wordonfire.org](http://www.wordonfire.org) (Bishop Robert Barron’s ministry with free podcasts including Mass, and various topics)
- Be at peace knowing that through prayer you are nourished and present to your loved ones, even if you can’t be together due to social distancing
- Have Masses said for your loved one
- Pray for the souls in purgatory (we’re the Communion of Saints); pray with gratitude, strength, perseverance
- Make a holy hour in the chapel for your loved one: converse with God about your concerns and feelings (anger, fear, sorrow, regret, numbness, avoidance, denial, etc.)
- Pray the Rosary after daily Mass at SJV Church

## “How would I ever make it alone?”

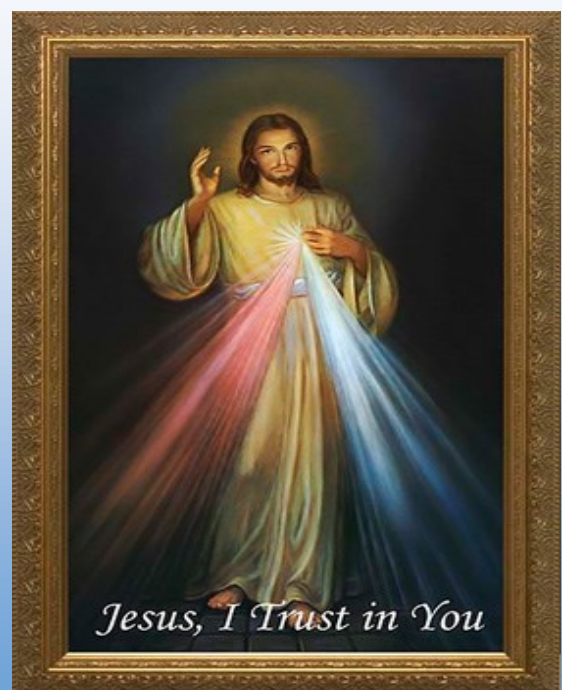
by Erin Diehl

Eight years ago, when my husband, Dave, died with cancer after only three months’ illness, I was so overwhelmed with loneliness I thought the huge chasm of pain would never be filled. The days were an endless maze of meaningless routine, and my emotions ran amok like a malfunctioning roller coaster.

The nights were even worse. I couldn’t sleep and spent the lonely hours trying to read and pray, or wandering from room to room seeking I knew not what. I was alone and my big, old Victorian house was filled with memories and heartbreaking reminders of our 43 happy years together. How would I ever make it alone?

Now I look back, and although I still miss my husband’s goodness and loving presence, I feel only a gentle ache in my heart. Today I agree with an anonymous quote I put on my refrigerator door eight years ago: “It’s not so bad—and you’re not the only one!” How did I get to this point of having a peaceful heart?

**Working Your Way Through:** Having decided eight years ago to be a “creative survivor,” as outlined in one of the many books I read on grief during those sleepless nights, I tried to do all the practical things I could. I did not feel like myself for a very long time, but some of the things I found helpful may help you, too.





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**Reach out to friends:** Having many friends has always been one of my most cherished blessings. Perhaps this is a result of having been an only child and learning early to reach out to others. After my husband's death, I had to learn that when my loneliness seemed overwhelming I could not sit around and wait for someone to call me. I needed to initiate the encounter.

**Commemorate your loss:** If you are grieving the death of a loved one, find a way to express the loss you feel, and also to symbolize the ongoing presence of that loved one in your life. Find a way to celebrate the gift that your loved one has been to you. Perhaps you could plant a tree or write a poem. However you choose to memorialize your loved one, draw comfort from the fact that nothing can take your cherished memories from you or erase the untold ways your loved one has touched your life and remains very much with you.

**Trust that the pain will pass:** Give yourself time to grieve and to heal. There is no set timetable and no need to surround yourself with "busyness" all the time. Being alone for awhile may allow you to learn valuable things about yourself that will help with future relationships.

**Cultivate an appreciation for solitude:** Find activities you can do alone that bring you satisfaction and peace of mind and heart. Perhaps gardening will bring you comfort, or painting, music, reading, walking—the list is limited only by your imagination. At your time of deepest loss, try to find something special to do that brings you joy. A quiet time for prayer can encourage a greater appreciation for the joys of time alone. You can never replace the person you have lost, but you can find comfort in solitude if you learn to befriend it.

**Get the support you need:** After an experience of great loss, it is natural to feel a variety of emotions. Learning that you're not "the only one" will help to connect with others who have experienced a loss similar to your own.

**Turn to God for strength:** My faith in God was and is the best coping tool I have. Prayer and meditation can be excellent paths to inner peace and balance. If you are feeling too distressed to pray or sit quietly, don't forget that there are a host of excellent spiritual books and tapes.

It is hard to be thankful and sad at the same time. Spend a little time pondering the many things in your life for which you are grateful. With time, you may even feel gratitude for the admittedly painful lessons you are learning as you move through your loss.

**Take Heart:** Each year I make a retreat at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky. In the beautiful surroundings and solitude I am able to pray, as the late Thomas Merton did, that even though I have no idea where I am going, I can trust God and have no fear. God is everywhere with me and will not leave me to face my perils alone.

Feisty Teresa of Avila gave me the quote I live by, and which my husband had engraved on a bracelet for me: "All things pass." And indeed they do—including the overwhelming pain that you may be feeling right now. It is only human to cry out for relief. Surely it will be forthcoming from the God who loved us first. ✦

*This is an edited version of an article by Erin Diehl, who is a clinical pastoral counselor, a spiritual director and a writer. She lives in Ohio.*

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Books on Grieving by Jeannie Ewing: *A Time to Laugh and A Time To Weep, For Those Who Grieve, From Grief to Grace...* See website for articles and a complete list of her books: [www.jeannieewing.com](http://www.jeannieewing.com)

*Winter Grief, Summer Grace* by James E. Miller

For additional books, see Bereavement section in SJV Church Library

## *Grieving with Great Hope*

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See our website: [sjvsedona.org/grief-ministry/](http://sjvsedona.org/grief-ministry/)

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