

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

53 ST. PATRICK'S PLACE STATEN ISLAND, NY 10306

May 10, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

Today's Gospel, John XIV, says "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God. Have faith in Me." This is the Gospel that is used most often at our funeral masses. It is very comforting to bereaved parishioners.

Forty years ago in 1980 there were a more than normal number of funerals at St. Patrick's in the Spring and Summer months, and many of the families were looking for counseling in the Fall. There were too many applicants for individual counseling, so we decided, in the manner of twelve step groups, to gather them together so that, with the help of a facilitator, they could help each other to go through the stages of bereavement toward healing. We started our Grief Group on October 14, 1980, the first one in the Archdiocese. After a year Pat DelZoppo became the facilitator, and within a short time he took our program to Cardinal Cooke and suggested that it become the program for the whole Archdiocese. The Cardinal made him Archdiocesan Director of Bereavement and he set up the program in all ten counties of the Archdiocese, and in many other dioceses throughout the country. What had started in our rectory living room forty years ago spread to the parishes of our entire country.

There was a great need for bereavement programs of that type. There were people in our first group who had not faced their bereavement for as much as 9 years. They had gone on with their lives, kept busy, looked for distractions, and never stopped to feel their feelings: to express their anger, their grief, their disorientation, their loneliness. Their "hearts were troubled" and they didn't face what was eating away at their insides. They didn't cry. They didn't talk about it. They just repressed it.

Whenever we bury anything like that deep within our psyches we bury it alive. It will rise up and do damage to our lives: our relationships, our businesses, our productivity, our vitality, even our health. Just talking about it, feeling the feelings with other people who understand goes a long way toward healing. Once the feelings are unearthed, and expressed, and accepted we can turn to God in faith and receive the rest of the healing. Jesus says: "Have faith in God. Have faith in Me." Our wounds are not completely healed until Jesus finishes the job with us in the kingdom, but we get much, much better. We can go on with our lives because we have dealt with the hurt and we have been swept up in the love of God that floods into our lives when we get rid of the pool of anger and grief and guilt and fear that envelopes our lives during grief.

And, of course, at this time we remember that Jesus kept his word for our relatives. He prepared a place for them and He came to take them with Him. They went to a better place, and now He is taking care of them completely. They have received the final, ultimate healing and have been transformed into glorious, resurrected, eternal life. And, we will see them again! If we truly believe this, and we have allowed ourselves to grieve, our hearts will not be troubled. We will go on with our lives, and we will look forward to that day when we will all be together again, gathered around Jesus in His Kingdom.

God bless you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey D. Conway". The signature is fluid and includes a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jeff Conway, Pastor

JPC/smb