

Grieve Well 2024
by Fr. Cedric Pisegna, C.P.

I'm sorry if you lost a loved one, whether a relative or friend. Even losing your pet (animal) can be devastating. Grieving the person/loss hurts and it is a suffering we all must bear. As a Christian, God's grace as well as time bring healing.

1 Thessalonians tells us, "We don't grieve like the rest of the world, without hope." The early Christians were waiting for the second coming of Jesus and because it was delayed, believers were beginning to pass away. Paul was reminding those who had lost loved ones of our "living" hope through Jesus. In fact, hope is one of three things that lasts forever (faith and love are the other two). It is because of our sure hope that we can grieve differently from the rest of the world.

The hardest thing I ever had to do was preside at the funeral liturgies of my Dad and Mom (fourteen years apart). I had a towel right by my side. I was afraid I would lose it, cry, and not be able to continue. Those liturgies were a rite of passage for me as a man. My parents were my best friends and my biggest supporters. The loss was unspeakable. But I took courage and I was able to not only preside, but celebrate well because of the hope Jesus gives us. I call heaven "The Great Reunion." One day we will be together again. Our reunion will be as if no time has passed. We will pick up right where we left off. The best is yet to come!

Many ask about their pets. Will they be in Heaven? I think so. The lion will lie down with the lamb we are told. God protects both man and animal we read from the Psalms. Our pets will enjoy the freedom of the Children of God in paradise! Another joy of heaven will be the reunion with our pets.

One of our Passionist priests, a big, tall good-looking Italian told me something significant when he saw me after my dad's funeral. He told me, "Grieve well." He was saying, "Feel what you have to feel. Allow yourself to grieve in your own way. Then, don't stay stuck. Move through the stages of grief and come to peaceful acceptance." Now I tell those who are mourning all the time: "Grieve well."

Many people allow themselves to get stuck in emotions. Be your own best friend and encourage yourself to keep moving. Your loved one would

want that for you. I told myself to be strong and wouldn't allow myself to get stuck. I discovered God's grace and time brings healing. While I miss my Mom and Dad dearly, I have great memories and I go on living well as they would want me to.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote two classic books on grieving: "*On Death and Dying*" and "*On Grief and Grieving*." She wrote about several stages of grieving such as denial, bargaining, and anger. In grief, you know there are stages such as shock, disbelief, overwhelming loss, sadness, bewilderment, despair and a whole kaleidoscope of feelings. Eventually we move through these emotions to "peaceful acceptance." You grieve well when you don't stay stuck in any one area but move to this *hope-filled acceptance* of the passing of your beloved. Time and grace bring healing. But so does your own self-encouragement. Don't allow yourself to be a victim.

Grieving well also means you reconstruct your life. You remake yourself. Things have changed and you must adapt and change too. Perhaps you will pursue more education. You might want to join a grief group. You take care of yourself and become your own person. Simply put, you *move forward*. Remember the theme song from the movie Titanic? It is a song sung by Celine Dion about grieving and expresses well what I have written here. *My heart will go on...* If you are grieving, and aren't we all, I tell those who are mourning: "Grieve well."

When it comes to grieving, know that you will experience many feelings. Let them come and go. Some days will be better than others. There will be ups and downs. Don't let anyone tell you what you should feel. Everyone grieves in their own way. Grieving is a season in your life. New seasons and times are coming. Some of you will be helped greatly by joining a grief group. My friend did and now she is the head of the group! The loss of her husband led her to get her mind off of herself and help others.

I studied in Rome some time back. One of the places I visited was the Catacomb of St. Callistus. Callistus was a Pope and martyr from the 200s. The Catacombs are the underground tunnels where the early Christians would hide out. Because of their faith they were being persecuted and they had to celebrate their faith underground. I celebrated Mass in this catacomb with about 40 people.

Archeologists have found one of the earliest Christian symbols in this catacomb. Etched into one of the walls is an anchor with a cross on top.

This comes from the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 6, which says, “We have this hope (in the resurrection/afterlife) as an anchor firm and steadfast, for our soul.” Apparently while under persecution and in danger of death, a Christian drew the symbol of his/her hope into the wall.

You know what an anchor does. Wherever a storm approaches, the ship is moved out of the safe harbor and anchored in open water. The anchor digs deep. When the wind blows and the waves swell high, the ship stands firm, strong, and unshakable because it is solidly anchored. Similarly, when the winds of grief blow and the waves of loneliness and sorrow lash us, we can stand immovable and unshakable because of our living hope.

My prayer for you reading who may be grieving is that you will be strong, firm, and secure. We don't grieve like the rest without hope. Ours is a living hope that anchors our soul. Hope lasts forever. One day it will be hope realized. *Grieve well* because the Great Reunion is coming and *the Best is yet to come*.

Here are a few ways to cope with grieving:

- Admit you are powerless over the grief.
- Believe God has the power to help you.
- Surrender yourself and your feelings and loved one to the care of God over and over again.
- Be proactive about shifting your time from time spent with him/her to something else. Take responsibility for your grief!
- Perhaps take up a new hobby, read, get involved at church/community and pray more.
- Join a grief group.
- Get a pet. Animals work wonders . . .
- Be your own best friend and steer yourself away from your negative thoughts.
- Move forward. No one can do this for you. Do it for yourself.
- Be kind to yourself. Exercise, take walks, get a good perspective on where you are in life and where you are going.
- You are in a new season. Embrace it, celebrate it, and don't resist it.
- Have hope that things will get better in time . . . they will.

Don't let your heart be troubled (Jesus). Feelings can be overwhelming but you still have a choice. You have power. You don't have to be a victim of these feelings. Take responsibility for your own grieving.