

## GRIEF

It is a sickening feeling for which there is no pill. Like grubs that infiltrate a lawn, this feeling often comes unannounced and rips through the heart, overwhelms the mind, diminishes the spirit, and weakens the body. Words fail to capture the full meaning of this feeling which affects old and young alike. It is a feeling that can snowball into a wide array of sentiments that include hurt, loss, guilt, bewilderment, sorrow and emptiness. The feeling of which I am attempting to describe is none other than grief.

On this All Souls Day in which we pray for our beloved dead, grief is real for all of us. For as we remember our deceased family members and friends, we grieve their loss. We grieve their absence in our lives. Grief is a common denominator for us. It is a bond that links us on this evening.

One of our first encounters with this reality of grief originates from the magic of television and the various Charlie Brown specials. One of the memorable expressions from that series of shows was the phrase "Good Grief." Talk about an oxymoron. How can grief be good? And yet, when entered into in a spirit of faith, grief can eventually become not only good, but a blessing as well.

The Gospel for tonight takes us to the empty tomb and the person of Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is weeping outside the tomb not only because the death of Jesus remains fresh, but now his remains are gone. In fact, when asked by the angel, "Why are you weeping?" Mary Magdalene responds by saying, "They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they laid him." Lo and behold, Mary encounters someone who appears to be the gardener. He asks the same question uttered before, namely, "Why are you weeping?" Then this stranger looks at her and says, "Mary" and Mary for her part turns and sees that this gardener is really Jesus himself, the risen Lord. Jesus says, "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." And then Jesus challenges Mary Magdalene to go and announce the good news to the disciples. In effect, Jesus wants Mary Magdalene to let go and move on with and for others.

My brothers and sisters amid our collective grief which manifests itself in a myriad of ways that include weeping, withdrawal, selfishness, spiritual paralysis and even denial, the Lord invites us to let go and move on and trust in the resurrection, where the prophesy of Isaiah in tonight's first reading will be fulfilled, "The Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces."

St. Paul points to this new life in tonight's second reading when he says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us."

The lit Paschal candle positioned in front of the sanctuary symbolizes that new life in Christ with the resurrection. All of our loved one's who have died and whom we grieve so much now share in eternal life. As we call them by name tonight we ask a family member to come forward to receive a light from the Paschal candle, otherwise known as the Easter candle. While our hearts are empty and the burden of their loss is heavy causing some of us to weep like Mary Magdalene, we can take heart in knowing that they occupy the place prepared for them by Jesus. And one day, God willing, we will join them and see God face to face. Until then, may the light from this candle illuminate the darkness of our grief and dispel our despair with the hope of the resurrection whereby there is no more grief—only joy and gladness.

Eternal rest grant onto them O Lord. And may the perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls and all the souls of the faithful departed through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen!