

## Monastic Scribe XII: October 1, 2021

### GOOD GRIEF...!

While on vacation on Cape Cod earlier this summer, I watched a PBS program on folk music. The Smothers Brothers hosted a program featuring Judy Collins, The Kingston Trio, The Lamplighters, and many more who originally sang in the 60s and 70s. (My favorites – Peter, Paul and Mary – were not there since Mary has since died.) I was delighted and they brought back many good memories from my young adulthood. As I mused on those years of yore, I was filled with nostalgia and some sadness. It is all in the past. While not momentous memories, they do indicate how I have to let go, even grieve, some people and some things that are no more. My life has been full and I have to be thankful for so much but I have lost much as well.

Grief is built into life and certainly into loving. My mother, father, brother, nephew, close aunts, good friends, fellow-monks are all gone. My youth and my energy and great health are gone too. I stand on a street corner in Boston and watch a young guy strut across the street in a trot. “I used to be able to do that too,” I think to myself. But how can this compare with people who have lost spouses, children, beloved relationships, as well as homes, jobs, health or even their country? It is clear to me now that no one who loves will get through life without a broken heart.

Some people seem better at grieving than others. But, without doubt, grieving is necessary for all our souls. There are some people, hardened by life, who can suppress all grief and just try to move on in life. It is a mirage that will eventually backfire.

We have to feel and even feel deeply our losses. We have to share them with somebody. How fortunate to have an “anam cara,” a real soul friend. We have to weep, sometimes shout in anger, curse God for letting this happen. We may have to let someone hold us to know we are still alive. It takes some time. It takes at least a year to go through remembrances of birthdays and anniversaries before we can begin to move on in life without really ever forgetting or ceasing to feel the loss.

Grieving is not the same for everybody. I tend to think that it comes more naturally for women than men. Women feel and are better at articulating their feelings. Men live in the external world and are good at protecting, building, being soldiers or firefighters, daring to put their lives down for others. But they often lack an internal life that is sensitive to pain and joy. Widows seem to move on in

## **Monastic Scribe XII: October 1, 2021**

life with the help of other women better than widowers who do not have close friends. I also need to say that I realize that the many griefs of life do not compare with the traumatic harm done by sexual abuse, rape, killing other humans in warfare, and other similar human tragedies.

I have come to love the feast of Mary as the Mother of Sorrows which we celebrate on September 15th. There are so many mothers who worry about, feel pain about, grieve their children whom they lose to death, or drugs, or incarceration. Mary grieves with them. It is good to see someone like Mary grieve. It is human to try to block suffering and pain. Grief isn't rational. Richard Rohr says that grief is a liminal space, a time of transformation to learn what grief, suffering, pain, have to teach us. He says that we would much rather be angry than sad. We can blame somebody, including God. Weeping, feeling, sharing our pain with another helps us to feel the tragedy of things, the sadness of things. It is ultimately about loving. Grief is our common bond that connects us with everyone, everywhere.

How do we pray as we grieve? The Psalms are particularly helpful, especially the psalms of lament. We do not believe, perhaps at first, that they are appropriate prayers, but they allow us to rant at God and express our pain. The lament psalms are helpful both to personal grieving and also the grief we feel about the church or society that we once so loved and have no more.

My father died when I was 26 years old, a year after ordination to the priesthood. I thought I was the man now being strong for my mother. I did not grieve. It has taken me some years to realize and feel the unfinished business I had with my father, how I really needed him. Now I know that grief never really goes away. It is just something we bear with love, forgiveness, gratitude. I understand how human I am and that is a gift indeed.

Do you have other thoughts on grieving? Do feel free to share your thoughts with me at [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org) You are in my thoughts and prayers.

**Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL**

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.