

Grief and Loss series, #4 from Fr. Tom Konopka

Will I ever get out of this sadness?



One of the reasons that people remain angry and never seem to move ahead after a death is the fear of the sadness that the anger covers up. Anger is a protective coat that is needed, but one we cannot keep on. The raw sadness of loss reflects our love of the other. This sadness is not a depression even though it may feel like it. We must self-monitor if this becomes a depressive episode, but the sadness is unavoidable.

Sadness is the most difficult stage of grief for friends, family members and co-workers of the grieving person to fully understand. It is at this point that others begin to say: “Snap out of it.” “It been (however long).” “Time to move on.” “Just get over it.” “He/she is with the Lord.” etc. Many times, this reflects how uncomfortable the people around you are with grief or people who are stuck in their own grief.

If a person, or their family, or friend become concerned with what the person in grief maybe doing or saying, then a professional is needed to make the determination if the sadness has turned into depression. Any thoughts of suicide need to be taken seriously, or any concerns that a person may be headed in that direction, need to be addressed as soon as possible.

We see this sadness after death in the person of Mary of Bethany. When Jesus finally showed up in Bethany, after they had sent word that Lazarus was very sick, He meets Martha at the gate. She is the epitome of anger. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died!” In her words, you can feel the anger she was feeling. In the exact same phrase, Mary expresses her deep sadness and suffering. “If you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus is so moved by the suffering of his friends; the most profound and shortest words of the Scripture are uttered: “And Jesus wept.” Jesus, in the fullness of his humanity, expressed the deep pain of human loss. Jesus, in the fullness of his divinity, consecrated our tears into the experience of the Divine One who always walks by our side. We never cry alone when someone dies; Jesus cries with us. He is always there with His arms around us.

This is one area which often is problematic for men. Just as many women are given the message not to get angry, many men are given the message not to cry. “Keep a stiff upper lip.” “Big boys do not cry.” “Stay in the game, no matter what.” Tears are human and important. It takes less energy to cry than to keep them in and avoid the deep sadness that accompany those tears. Finding a comfortable space to cry and let it out is unique for each person. The important thing is to let the tears and sadness out. Again, we look to Jesus. He knew loss in his life and he is our model of how to express our sadness. We always grieve in faith and hope.

One thing to remember in this process is, every encounter with the sadness is one step further to acceptance of the person’s death or leaving. It is a sign that the grieving individual is moving toward the next chapter in his life. This is an essential part of the process. It is easy to get caught up in the, “they are in a better place” attitude. That is true, but there is still a break or fracture of a relationship which hurts. As a person mourns, the sadness is normal. Its intensity will wane over time, but there will always be a tender place in the heart. This tender place will be the place where we encounter Jesus, just like Martha and Mary.