

Grief and Faith at Christmas

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On the first Christmas after Monica died I knew she would be “home for Christmas.” Her heavenly home. But I wanted her here. On earth. In the home we created during the thirty-eight years of our marriage. I wanted her sharing that day with our children and grandchildren. Sharing that day with me.

Yes, as I said in the previous chapter, I believe in the Communion of Saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting but still...

Death is awful.

After her death in early January of that year I had thought a lot about death. I thought about it whether I wanted to or not. (I’m sure the same holds true for you and your spouse.) And I thought about faith. About phrases and hymns and teachings and beliefs that used to be so easy. So almost-automatically comforting.

Yes, Monica’s “with me” all the time now. Yes, since she’s with God, she’s with Christ in a particular way in the Eucharist at Mass. Yes, she’s free from pain and worry and fear. But still...

Death is awful.

Grief is awful.

And faith doesn’t eliminate either one.

I think those of us who are grieving—especially on a special day, like Christmas or a birthday or anniversary—can be tempted to think “If I only had more faith, if I only better used the faith I have, I wouldn’t feel so horrible. This wouldn’t be so horrible.”

But I don’t think that’s true. And, as is so often the case, it’s Mary—our Blessed Mother—who shows us that just isn’t so. Certainly no one (except her Son) had more faith than she did. No one better used that faith. Better lived that faith. But even her heart was “pierced by a sword” (see Lk 2:35).

Rightfully so, she’s known under the title of “Our Lady of Sorrows.”

It’s one she earned. One she lived.

Scripture doesn’t tell us, but who could doubt she deeply grieved the death of her beloved Joseph? Of her darling little boy, Jesus?

It seems safe to speculate that at times she pondered in her heart that this wasn’t how her life was “supposed to be.” How she had thought and prayed it would be.

As you’re grieving the loss of a loved one this Christmas, you may find yourself thinking this isn’t how your life was “supposed to be.” How you thought and prayed it would be.

But it is.

And there’s no changing that.

If you’re grieving the loss of a loved one this Christmas, I say to you what I said to myself during those early years of widowhood: Be gentle with yourself. Be patient with yourself. Be kind to yourself.

Do what you want to do and can do when it comes to this holiday and holy day. Accept the fact that perhaps, this year, you can’t do what you want to do or think you “should” do. Not now. Not yet.

And that’s OK.

It well may be that since the death of your loved one, you’ve grown in wisdom, age, grace ... and faith.

But still....

Widow Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for me.