

October 28, 2020

I recently watched the movie, King of Staten Island. The movie is a loose interpretation of the actual life of Pete Davidson, a comedian often featured on Saturday Night Live who lost his father when Pete was the age of 7, a New York City Fire Fighter, on September 11, 2001, in the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Many of you would be put off and offended at much in the movie in the way of language, drug use, sexual behavior and so on, so I would not recommend it, but I think it is a serious and very authentic insight into the complex and multi layered effects of grief in our lives.

I very much admire Pete Davidson and the courage he displayed in allowing his life to be examined by outsiders and strangers. He is a charming, sensitive, and very real young man, as far as I am concerned. Too many, far too many, young men ignore their grief and their losses, and they grow up and become tyrannical bullies of themselves and, quite often, others.

The world that we live in is dominated by terribly damaged men in all categories of profession, place, and circumstance, who have no idea who they really are, aching with unacknowledged grief and the pain that it brings, afflicting other persons and our world with their rage, often disguised as righteousness and benevolence, causing untold and unnecessary pain and suffering.

If things were different, I would have showed the movie as a part of our Adult Faith Formation offerings with the caveat mentioned above and I think those who watched it with me would have found our discussions afterward to be very fruitful.

Grief is tough, it often comes disguised, it takes us to places that we usually leave unexamined in our lives and we either shoulder our way through our griefs or we deny them and the grief gets buried in our heads, our unconscious minds and works its way out into our lives disguised as all kinds of things and, often, it wreaks havoc with our lives for years.

Physical ailments, anger, fear, resentments, isolation, self-medication, obsessive behaviors of all kinds, and failures in multiple ways, failures in

relationships, work, love, especially self-love, are all the results of unacknowledged and unaccepted grief. Grief never leaves us alone until we acknowledge it and bring it to the light of day in our conscious minds regularly.

Grief is a solitary experience because each grief is unique to the person and the moment and it seizes us without warning sometimes, that is why I never recommend grief support groups or I never encourage “closure” as our griefs are never over, the pain may and hopefully does change, it becomes lighter, less obtrusive as long as it isn’t forgotten.

When we acknowledge grief, we move closer to knowing ourselves more honestly and with greater freedom than we could ever imagine but it takes time and working with grief is painful and grief accompanies all of our losses no matter what or who we lose.

In my mind/heart, the most important text in all of scripture and, without a doubt the most unique, is in the Gospel of John when we read/hear that Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus, the one he loved.

The second most important text, like the first, in the Gospel of John, is the story of those 6 stone water jars filled to the brim with not water, but excellent wine at that wedding feast in Cana in Galilee.

I have a friend who will tell me, You may forget who you laugh with but you will never forget who you cry with.

And another friend, who just this week, a young friend as a matter of fact, told me, “Father, the important thing is to plant love wherever there is soil.”

In these days of uncertainty and loss, do not let your losses go unattended, talk about them with someone you trust or love and listen well, as well as you can, to those who tell you of what and who they grieve.

