

August 6, 2020

The spiritual significance of tears like the waters of creation that we read about in the Book of Genesis is that in the loss of what causes the tears, there is something new on the horizon, something new is in the making, not to replace what or who is lost but to fulfill what or who was lost.

Helping another person take their tears seriously is one of the most noble of human gifts, allowing another human being to cry and to receive those tears without judgment but with compassion is one of the most humanizing of relational opportunities that we can experience.

I have said before that the most important thing that I do, that any parish does these days, is accompany people through the sickness, death, dying, and grieving that is the only experience every single person will share.

We have seen over the last 30 years a gradual decline in the actual practice of any denominational religion but in Christianity it seems to be more evident, maybe because I am a Catholic, but the vitality and importance of what Christ revealed in the texts of the New Testament and the living tradition of actual Catholic people has been neutered, at least in my observation, and nowhere was this vitality and importance more necessary than in ministering to the sick, the dying, and the grieving.

The embarrassingly pathetic attempts, by too many segments of our Church to imitate so called evangelical churches with their ideological/political agendas and disdain and contempt for so many of the people we judge so harshly, and to make intentional disciples with generic Christian music and a testoteroned Jesus, does not serve our wonderful and deeply human need to console and be consoled with truth and compassion and genuine human touch of spirit, mind, and body.

One of the very difficult aspects of presiding at a funeral in these times is that I cannot see faces, it is particularly troubling because I cannot see tears or smiles and my first task in ministry is to "shorten the distance" between me as one called upon to offer a service and those being served and funeral rituals can be extremely crucial to the grieving and healing of minds and hearts.

Shortening the distance is the term I use to mean that some connection has been made or a rapport has been established, usually that is done by eye to eye contact and some acknowledgement of a common experience so that ministry might happen.

The recognition of a shared meaning found in a common experience put us on the same footing and on the road to a vocabulary that might be useful in opening up insights, values, and beliefs found in our Catholic Tradition but expressed in words that are too “churchy” or too pious to actually mean anything that might console or give hope to those suffering the loss of one that they loved or cared about.

That is kind of what parables are, ordinary words that give meaning, albeit partial, to deeper more spiritual truths but with masks on that is almost impossible to gage because you cannot determine a smile or a look into the eyes on a face that says, YES, I know what you mean! or YEAH! I know that feeling or I don't have a clue as to what the hell you are talking about!

So for funerals these days, as the song goes, We walk by faith and not by sight.

My hope is that those 12 baskets of left over loaves and fishes that we heard about last Sunday are enough to sustain us until we can meet again and cry copious tears at all that we have lost in anticipation of what God is readying for all those who are loved and do love and have loved.