

March 11, 2018

Fourth Sunday of Lent

**Rejoice, Oh Jerusalem and all who are in mourning.
Exult and be satisfied at God's consoling breast.**

Lord, though we can't see past today, we trust your love will never fail us.

Hard Times

We have been focusing this Lent on how our faith helps us to work through tragedy and suffering. This year it was Florida. In 2013 it was in the Clackamas Town Center in Portland. I was there at that mall the day before - at that spot. Then on that Friday, it was Sandy Hook in Connecticut, and on and on. These plus all those difficult times that happen in our own life times. It sometimes seems like it is more than we can handle.

We've been asking ourselves during this Lenten season how to carry on in the face of such events? Wishing they would simply go away won't work. We know sadly that it won't be that long before something similar happens, and we find ourselves praying for more victims.

What Helps Face Hard Times?

What, we might ask, can help us face such events head on and respond in a positive way, both for the sake of the victims and for ourselves. There could be any number of such steps, I will suggest only two, and perhaps the most obvious.

First, "*Go Within and Pray*". I don't mean just say prayers, I mean run into the arms of God within you and hang on as if your lives depended on it.

"Lord, please help us in this time of loss and overwhelming grief. We don't understand why life is filled with such pain and heartache. But we turn our eyes to you as we seek to find the strength to trust in your faithfulness. We will wait on you and not despair; we will quietly wait for your salvation. Our hearts are crushed, but we know that you will not abandon us forever. Please help us see your compassion, Lord. Help us through the pain so that we will hope in you again. Though we can't see past today, we trust your great love will never fail us."

Going inside and praying from the depths of our being softens something in us and brings us into contact with a Larger Presence who gives us comfort and strength.

Second: "*Do Something*". What? Anything at first - whatever is close by, anything that keeps one from becoming paralyzed by the pain - and then moving our focus on towards doing something that helps another.

Some Examples

A friend of mine who lost her husband in an accident said she went home immediately after the services and thoroughly cleaned her house. It kept her moving, she was doing something - anything that would keep her from becoming paralyzed by the pain of her loss. Doing this touched that larger presence within her who comforted and strengthened her.

I periodically visit South Fork Prison Camp east of Tillamook. I don't do much when I go out there. It's more about the closeness that develops among the inmates and those of us who go out there that touches that larger presence within me who comforts and strengthens me.

I observed a wife once in an anointing of her husband bend down and whisper tenderly and lovingly to him what she wanted to say to him. Afterwards, she told me, "*I feel so much better now.*" She did something; she touched that larger presence within herself who comforted and strengthened her.

The Lakota Indian tribes in their recent stand-off with the US government over the oil pipe line running through their ancestral lands said they knew they were going to lose. Still they danced their dances and sang their songs, because they believed they were fulfilling an ancient prophecy that all the nations of the earth would come together to pray for peace. They were doing something that touched that larger presence within themselves who comforted and strengthened them.

Jesus in his last visit to Jerusalem knew what was about to happen to him. Still he prepared a dinner for his friends and himself, giving thanks for them and for the mission given him by his Father, all of which touched that Larger Presence within himself who comforted and strengthened him.

Archbishop Sample of the Archdiocese of Portland which covers the western half of Oregon visited here this past week. He mentioned how he was taken with this sweet church. He related how he helps in the Downtown Chapel, Blanchet House and St. Francis Parish in downtown

Portland by serving meals to the homeless. He does something; that touches that larger presence within himself who comforts and strengthens him.

Alice Walker says: "*Hard times require furious dancing.*"

"Going inside and praying" and "Doing something" during something softens something in us and brings us into contact with a Larger Presence within ourselves who comforts and strengthens us. We would do well to consider what we might do to help bring us comfort and strength during our hard times - perhaps something simple and small. It will only develop. As Jesus said in Lk. 23:31: "For if you do these things when the wood is green, what will happen in you when it is dry?"

There is nothing more life-giving - than to give life

*"Lord, you have helped us during this time of loss and overwhelming grief. We don't understand why life is filled with such pain and heartache, but when we turn our eyes to you, we find the strength to trust in your faithfulness. When we wait on you and do not despair, we find our salvation. When our hearts are crushed, we know that you will not abandon us forever. Thank you for helping us see your compassion, Lord. You help us through the pain so that we can hope in you again. Though we can't see past today, we know your great love will never fail us.
Amen"*

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