



WORTHWILE REFLECTIONS ON OUR THREE READINGS—FIFTEEN CHALLENGES TO BE NEGOTIATED AS WE DEAL WITH THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE— ESPECIALLY A SPOUSE.

First Reading—Our Secret Cemetery

In our first reading today from Ezechiel 34:12-14, the prophet speaks about God raising up Israel from her grave of exile. Commenting on this reading, Alice Camille writes:

Each of us has a secret cemetery in our lives where all the bodies are buried, so to speak. It's where our resentments are deep-sixed and our private scores are settled. We bury ex-friends there, as well as former bosses who injured us, family members we're not speaking to, dreams that were stillborn, humiliations we've suffered, and mistakes we can't bear to remember. Shoveling all of these memories into one dark graveyard doesn't really get rid of them, of course. The dead have a way of coming back to haunt us. The problem with the secret burial ground is that, eventually, a good share of our lives can end up underground. We ourselves need to be raised up from that place, and the only way to regain our freedom is to let all the ghosts of memory go free too.

Reflection Question

What can help you to visit the place where you have buried some dark secrets or resentments?

Second Reading. "Choose now what you wish to have chosen at life's end."

Reflecting on the second reading from Romans 8:8-11, which also speaks about death and resurrection, Alice Camille writes:

We're toast. I'm not kidding about this, but hopefully it comes as no surprise to you that death is not an optional ending to the human story. The word mortal is rooted in the Latin word for death. Every child born has a limited time warranty written into the contract. So if you're a realist, you live your life fully, consciously, and purposefully while you're here. And if you believe in the resurrection of the dead, you don't sweat the fact that life on earth is a short-term proposition. The formula for living well is astonishingly simple. As Saint Anthony Claret wrote in his autobiography, "Choose now what you would wish

to have chosen at life's end." No one who takes his advice will ever face regret.

Reflection Question

How does the knowledge that death and judgment awaits us at the end of our lives, impact the way we live our lives *now*?

The Gospel - hope as we deal with the winter months of life.

Reflecting on today's gospel concerning the raising of Lazarus, Jay Cormier write this beautiful story.

In her 70th winter, her health deteriorated rapidly. Finally, she had to be hospitalized. The doctor confided to her son that she had only a matter of weeks to live. The son agonized for days on whether he should tell her. Was there any hope he could give her? He decided not to tell her for the time being.

Instead, he concentrated on her birthday. He thought he would give her the most expensive and beautiful matching nightgown and robe he could find. At the very least she would feel stylish and dignified in her final days.

After unwrapping his gift, his mother said nothing. Finally, she said, "It's beautiful, dear, but would you mind returning it to the store? I don't really need it."

She then picked up a newspaper and pointed to an ad for a beautiful leather purse designed for late spring and summer. "This is what I really want."

Her son was flabbergasted. Why would his ever-frugal mother want something so extravagant—a purse she could not use for months?

Then it dawned on him: His mother was asking how long she had to live. If he thought she'd be around long enough to use the purse, then she really would. When he brought the purse to her in her hospital bed, she held it tightly against her, a big smile on her face. A half a dozen purses later, the son bought his mother a new purse—for her 83rd birthday.

Resurrection is an attitude, a perspective that finds hope in the hardest times and uncovers life among the devastated and broken, that reveals light in the darkest night. To each one of us belongs the work of resurrection: to bring the life and love of God into the most everyday of situations. There are so many people who are waiting for the hope and healing of the Easter promise: to rise from despair, cynicism and alienation to joy, hope and a sense of belonging. As Jesus instructs Lazarus' friends to roll away the stone and

free Lazarus from his tomb, Jesus calls us to the work of Easter healing and transformation, the work of freeing one another from our graves of hopelessness, alienation and fear.

Fifteen Challenges to Negotiate as we Deal with the Loss of a Loved one especially one's spouse.

As we watch Martha, Mary and Jesus weep today because of Lazarus' death, we are reminded of all the people across the world who are grieving at this time because they have lost a loved one. The following are taken from a four page article I wrote some years ago on *Dealing with the Loss of a Spouse*. While some of the following points will not apply to the loss of a sibling or parent or child, several will apply. If you know someone who has lost a loved one recently, especially a spouse, consider sharing the following with them. If you are presently dealing with a loss, you might want to see how you are coping with the following check list.

- 1) Dealing daily with the roller coaster of feelings-the sadness, loneliness, anger, guilt, jealousy, depression, tiredness and confusion, the endless crying, the emptiness. Which feelings are the most difficult for you?
- 2) Tackling the stacks of paper work and paying bills, redoing one's will.
- 3) Coping socially-hating it when one more person asks: "How are you?" Being angry if they don't ask. Going to church and social functions alone.
- 4) Caring for one's emotional and physical health.
- 5) Facing anniversaries, birthdays, holidays and other special occasions.
- 6) Disposing of our loved one's clothes and other belongings.
- 7) Visiting the cemetery or Memorial Garden.
- 8) Deciding to wear or not wear the wedding ring.
- 9) Adjusting to the financial changes. This is especially stressful when the death of a loved one means a serious loss of income.
- 10) Relating to others. Death of a loved one can seriously affect the way parents, siblings, children and friends relate to each other.
- 11) Learning to take charge of all the "stuff" one's spouse or loved one used to handle.
- 12) Living daily with what seems to be unbearable emotional pain. Facing the grief without denying it or shelving it.

13) Being open to meeting new friends and making a life for ourselves without our lost loved one.

14) Re-negotiating our relationship with God and or church.

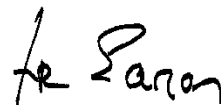
15) Loss of Meaning. This is especially true when one has spent a long time caring for one's loved one. Now that the loved one has died, the survivor may wonder, what is the purpose of my life now?

Did I miss out on any other challenges?

The rest of my four page article deals with:

- Twelve Important Things to Remember about the Grieving Process.
- Five Helpful Suggestions with the Grieving Process. The full article can be found on our parish website. www.ascensioncatholic.net, click on Catholic Beliefs, then Pastoral Issues.

Have a blessed week,



A Prayer

***My God, I can never prepare myself for loss,
It is always wrenching, disorienting.
But help me to trust that each loss can teach me
Not to cling so tightly; to let go, to fall into
the unknown where you lie waiting to meet me.
All will be lost: my loved ones, my body, my life.
But you have promised that all that is lost
Will be found again in you.
Help me find the riches hidden in my loss,
The rock-certainty of your love
In the swirling rapids of change.
Help me to lose that I may gain.
May all my losses lead me back to you.***

-Phillip Bennet