

Reflection for the Mass of Remembrance - 11/7/15

I see so many familiar faces here this morning. Thank you for being with us today.

When Assumption funeral planners meet with a grieving family, once introductions are complete and we begin to settle into dialog of preparation, the first thing most of us say is, "Please tell me about your loved one. What did you love most about him/her? What were his/her qualities?" This usually results in words flowing very quickly: Loving, Nurturing, Smart, Selfless, Caring, Fun to be Around, Jokester, Sensitive, Giving, Provider, Sacrificing, Faith-Filled, Loved God. Why do we begin dialog this way? For two reasons: first and foremost is to offer HOPE, to allow family members to reflect on the life of their loved one, to cherish those traits and qualities that brought comfort, love and fun into their lives. It gives people HOPE that their loved one lives on in those left behind. The second reason is that it allows us to know their loved one more fully. With that knowledge we can offer a selection of scripture readings and music selections that will fit in a more personal way and together we can prepare a funeral service composed specifically for their loved one. A few years ago on a week when I was involved with several funeral services, my husband said, "I don't know how you can work so much with dead people!" By God's grace, I quickly responded, "I don't work with dead people – I work with the living." Those left behind to deal with a great loss in their life. And it's true. By our faith, we believe that our loved one is at peace, but those left to go on without them must now deal with grief in their own way, on their own path – a path that no one else can walk except them. There are many levels of grief but they can all be categorized into five stages: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and finally

Acceptance. If you are able to join me in the living room after mass, we will expand our discussion on these five stages and share our journeys. For now though, I would like to share with you an article that I read this summer written by an elderly gentleman called:

I'm Old - A Letter About Grief

I'm old. What that means is that I've survived (so far) and a lot of people I've known and loved did not.

I've lost friends, best friends, acquaintances, co-workers, grandparents, mom, relatives, teachers, mentors, students, neighbors, and a host of other folks. I have no children, and I can't imagine the pain it must be to lose a child. But here's my two cents...

I wish I could say you get used to people dying. But I never did. I don't want to. It tears a hole through me whenever somebody I love dies, no matter the circumstances. But I don't want it to "not matter". I don't want it to be something that just passes. My scars are a testament to the love and the relationship that I had for and with that person. And if the scar is deep, so was the love. So be it.

Scars are a testament to life. Scars are a testament that I can love deeply and live deeply and be cut, or even gouged, and that I can heal and continue to live and continue to love. And the scar tissue is stronger than the original flesh ever was. Scars are a testament to life. Scars are only ugly to people who can't see.

As for grief, you'll find it comes in waves. When the ship is first

wrecked, you're drowning, with wreckage all around you. Everything floating around you reminds you of the beauty and the magnificence of the ship that was, and is no more. And all you can do is float. You find some piece of the wreckage and you hang on for a while. Maybe it's some physical thing. Maybe it's a happy memory or a photograph. Maybe it's a person who is also floating. For a while, all you can do is float. Stay alive.

In the beginning, the waves are 100 feet tall and crash over you without mercy. They come 10 seconds apart and don't even give you time to catch your breath. All you can do is hang on and float. After a while, maybe weeks, maybe months, you'll find the waves are still 100 feet tall, but they come further apart. When they come, they still crash all over you and wipe you out. But in between, you can breathe, you can function. You never know what's going to trigger the grief. It might be a song, a picture, a street intersection, the smell of a cup of coffee. It can be just about anything...and the wave comes crashing. But in between waves, there is life.

Somewhere down the line, and it's different for everybody, you find that the waves are only 80 feet tall. Or 50 feet tall. And while they still come, they come further apart. You can see them coming. An anniversary, a birthday, or Christmas, or landing at O'Hare. You can see it coming, for the most part, and prepare yourself. And when it washes over you, you know that somehow you will, again, come out the other side. Soaking wet, sputtering, still hanging on to some tiny piece of the wreckage, but you'll come out.

Take it from an old guy. The waves never stop coming, and somehow you don't really want them to. But you learn that you'll

survive them. And other waves will come. And you'll survive them too.

If you're lucky, you'll have lots of scars from lots of loves. And lots of shipwrecks.

AMEN.