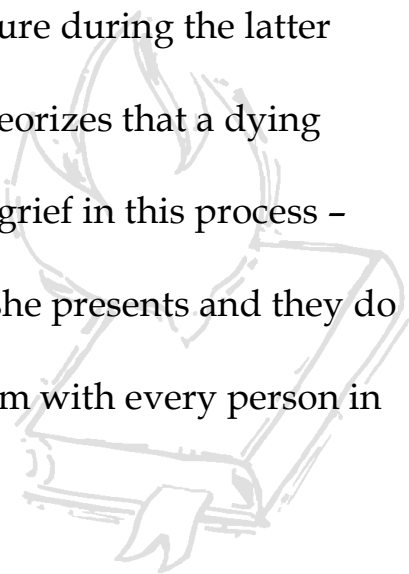


Homily
Good Friday - A
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
April 07, 2023

Is 52: 13 - 53: 12
Ps 31: 2, 6, 12-13, 15-16, 17, 25
Heb 4: 14-16; 5: 7-9
Jn 18: 1 - 19: 42

One of the courses I teach at the University of St. Francis is entitled, "Death and Dying." In the first half of the course, we focus on the secular, philosophical and theological aspects of this subject, focusing on how civilizations and different religions in the east and west deal with this subject in our lives. The second half of our course is focused on more of the pastoral aspects of those who are grieving, of those who are suffering and of those who are about to leave this earth.

In the second half of the course, I focus a great deal on what the Swiss-American psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross presents as a series of stages that she proposes suffering people endure during the latter stages of their life prior to death. Kübler-Ross theorizes that a dying person might endure five (later seven) stages of grief in this process - these stages are not exactly always in the order she presents and they do not always work as precisely as she presents them with every person in



their latter stages. That said, Kübler-Ross came upon this stages after listening to the patients talk to her about what they were enduring during their last stages of life.

In short, these are the seven stages of grief that Kübler-Ross proposes...

1. **Shock or Disbelief** can be the first reaction to news that a loved one has passed. Many people report numbness where they don't feel anything in the first few moments or days. This experience can be surprising to many individuals because they may not immediately sense the devastated feelings they would expect to feel with such news.
2. **Denial** doesn't so much occur in the grieving process when the mourner "forgets" that their loved one has passed away. Denial is related to how one expresses their emotions surrounding grief. For example, a person who continually says, "I'm fine," after a significant loss is likely denying his or her feelings. It may also be true that the bereaved person does not know how to share their feelings with those closest to them. For some people, putting words to feelings can be a challenge. Some people say, "I'm not sure how I'm supposed to feel."
3. **Anger** is not a universal emotion during the grief process. While it is not unusual to experience anger and many other feelings after a significant loss, it is not required. Some people become angry at themselves or the person who left them or simply at the situation they are left to face alone. Grief recovery coaching can provide a safe place to explore the anger and help uncover the source of the

anger. If you experience anger in grief, there is a reason it is there and it needs to be acknowledged and validated.

4. **Bargaining** refers to attempts to make a deal, often with God, to change the situation. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross noted bargaining in her observations of individuals dying from a terminal illness. Bargaining may not be so frequent when a loved one has died, but is likely present in other losses such as divorce, break up, job loss, home loss or other transition, where there is some hope the situation could be changed by an all-powerful God. Associated with this is **Guilt**, which can occur when the bereaved have regrets about things they did or said before the loved one died or left them. There is a wish to turn back the clock and do some things differently. This is another area where grief coaching can be especially helpful to give the griever a space to share their memories and regrets in a supportive environment. It is possible to get relief for a heart weighed down with guilt.
5. **Depression** is often used to describe the profound sadness that is a natural human reaction to grief and loss. The symptoms of grief are very similar to those of clinical depression.
6. **Acceptance** allows one to arrive at the belief that although life will never be the same again after the loss, there is hope that life will go on. Many people don't experience acceptance after loss because there are some specific tasks related to resolving grief that need to be addressed.
7. **Hope** for people of faith, knowing that life does not end at death and that for those of faith, what waits on the other side of life allows one to be at peace with God in eternal rest, where there will be no more sadness, no more crying and no more pain or suffering.

Kübler-Ross theorizes us that the problem we have in our society is that doctors and nurses sometimes are so intent on trying to cure the patient that sometimes they do not *listen* to the patient and try to walk the journey with them, according to the patient's specific experience in life, walking "in the shoes" of the grieving person, so to speak. Kübler-Ross will argue that each of us needs to understand that every person has an interesting story and has a different perspective of life that needs to be heard and acknowledged, that each person's story may very well be different than ours. If we understand and acknowledge how a suffering person reconciles with their journey at the end stages of life and how we can help that person find peace in this journey, then we begin to understand from a different perspective the subject of death and dying and their ultimate reality and ultimate destiny that hopefully will enrich our own ultimate reality and destiny in the Christian life we choose to live.

For what we do on Good Friday is to understand Christ's perspective of death and dying, that Christ was willing to endure this suffering and death so that we might get past all the stages of grief involved with our

Lord's own passion and death to reach the last stage of the grieving process, that of *hope*.

The whole idea of dealing with our Lord's passion and death is that through this seed of life that has died on the cross, one might find life on the other side, to understand that on the other side of death is eternal life and that a person of faith realizes that the death of the body is inevitable but the death of the soul is conquered by our believing in the presence of God who can lead us to the other side. We understand that if we follow God's ways and do what God asks us to do, we get to the other side as opposed to those who deny death and do everything possible in order to stay alive. Yes, those who try to deny death might enjoy things on earth for a time being without realizing that there's more to life than just death.

There was a chaplain from one of the local Joliet hospitals named Daniel Cunningham who once visited my students in the course I taught, sharing with the students what he called "The Tale of Two Families," two families who endured death at the same time in completely different ways.

According to Cunningham, one family that could not accept the fact that their matriarch was dying, and so they had the doctors do everything possible to keep her alive. In the process of trying to preserve life, the doctors actually made the situation worse, and the mother suffered more.

On the other hand, the family knew their matriarch was dying and accepted her life ending on earth. This particular family gathered around the bed and they started offering prayers of thanks to God for the life that this person had lived. They gave thanks to the family that their mother raised and those of whom she very quietly took care. The life of a mom and a dad is so thankless that sometimes we do not think about how much effort is put into raising children. This family decided to take time to thank God for the gift of life that was shared with them.

The beauty of going through the stages of grief, making it to the last stage of hope and understanding that life does not end at death – that the person of faith *defies* death, so to speak – there is hope for a greater future for the person who has died because there is hope in what we recall today with our Lord's passion and death on the cross. Scholars

refer to the passion and death of Jesus in the gospel of John as a type of “Book of Glory,” that we reflect not on the torture and pain that was inflicted on this God-man but rather the suffering this God-man endured for the sake of getting to the other side and showing us the path to get there, that God was willing to die for us so we could pass through death and be at rest in everlasting life.

The Book of Glory shows us how God was willing to suffer and die so we could live. The Book of Glory shows a God-man willing to endure everything that we endure on earth so that he could get us past this sin, past this punishment, past this suffering to the other side where there is no more suffering, no more tears, no more sadness.

One of the things about having faith, about being here in church, about asking God to be with us is that we know that we are not alone in the world of faith, especially at the time of death. No matter how much we think we have suffered in life, God has suffered infinitely more.

When people talk to me about how people have abandoned them, how people have turned away from them, I can only imagine how God feels when humanity as a whole turns away from God’s teachings,

whether it be abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty where people decide on their own that they are going to determine when a person should live or when a person should die, rather than allowing God to lead us and guide us. Jesus died on that cross by revealing himself to be God. We on our end have forgotten sometimes about what Jesus was willing to do to suffer and die for us, that no matter how bad we think we have it, God had it infinitely worse. So in this world, many do whatever they can to enjoy the things of the world and then become void of anything else at the time of death.

On this day, I think about about all the people who have rejected God, all the people who have turned away from faith. We keep droning on how by 2070, the largest demographic in this country will be those who do not believe in anything. How do you think God feels about that? Yet, God knows what the future holds and *still* died on the cross to give us a chance for hope that you and I both take for granted.

Sometimes we forget about God because we forget that on the other side of life there is this hope. Sometimes we are so consumed by our own personal needs, desires and our own personal sufferings that we

forget that God suffers infinitely more, which we remember today. This God-man died for you and me. Our Lord died for those who have been forgotten and for those who have suffered greatly by the hands of others. God died on the cross for those that no one remembers, because *God* remembers them... remembers *us*... and God loves them and loves you. God loves me with the hope that one day we might turn to God and ask God to lead us and guide us to where we need to go. For this reason, this death on the cross is a symbol of hope for those who can get past the stages of grief and the temptations of the world to focus on those things that are really important in our life – God, faith, family and friends who unite together as a Body of Christ.

If we allow ourselves to be consumed by consumerism, by communism, by whatever “ism” that this world tries to feed us, then sometimes we forget about Christianity and Catholicism, that God so loved the world that he gave His only Son so that anyone who might believe in him might not die, but might have eternal life (John 3: 16). This is a story of hope that we encounter today. This is a story of one man, one God who was willing to die so that we could live.

If we remember that, then we remember why we venerate that cross and why we give thanks to God for what he has done. We do this because we are not able to do this without God's help. Those before us were not able to fulfill the promises of the Old Testament. We did not, *we do not* have the strength to do what God wants us to do on our own.

So we come here today and give thanks to God for doing what we could not, what we cannot. We come here today to remember how through this death we find hope in a better tomorrow, whether it be the next day on earth or the next life in heaven. We give thanks and glory for God's promise of eternal life, for those who believe, so that we know that with God's help, we can defy death and receive life to the fold on the other side of this world.

Let us never forget this example of faith. Let us learn well what our Lord did for us and embrace it as a sign of hope for what is yet to come on that eternal Easter day. Let us learn this story well; let us share this story and share this love and share this gift of defying death with the people that we meet. This is what gives us hope on this Good Friday. This is our prayer today.