

Coping with Loss at Easter Time
John J. Reynolds, A.C.S.W.
Bronx, New York

The death of a loved one represents a major turning point in our lives. No matter how prepared, we are usually caught off guard by the many intense and confusing feelings that accompany the grief following the death of a loved one.

The pain and suffering of bereavement is always heightened during holiday times. Therefore, as Christians preparing to celebrate Easter, we are reminded of the joy of Christ's resurrection, the season of spring, renewal and rebirth, and of the expectations for happiness and family togetherness.

However, a person grieving the death of a loved one often feels emotionally out of place during a holiday. Their inner feelings do not match the expectations for joy and happiness that a holiday season brings. Therefore, these expectations can heighten a grieving person's sense of loneliness, isolation, loss and pain.

Coping and Christianity

Others who have struggled with these feelings have told me that they have found comfort in their belief system even when questioning their own faith. I can't tell you how many grieving people have said that if it weren't for their faith, they don't know how they would have coped. They have found comfort in the message of Easter. Through Christ's suffering, came resurrection and redemption for all mankind.

Jesus was no stranger to grief. He grieved deeply at the death of his good friend Lazarus and the passion in the garden of Gethsemane was about Jesus grieving His future as He felt the pain of abandonment, alienation and isolation. As we reflect on our suffering, we may be reminded of how Jesus' mother, Mary, must have grieved as she watched helplessly while her only son was crucified, died and buried.

When we feel angry with God and ask, "How can a benevolent God allow such pain?" we can remember that God understands and forgives our anger. In the midst of Christ's agony on the cross, He too asked, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?"

If, in the midst of our suffering, we find our faith wavering or are angry at God, we can bring our anger to our prayers. Even in anger, we can try to maintain a dialogue with God. The real lapse of faith is not in anger but in indifference. When we find ourselves struggling with issues of faith, we can talk to a clergy person who understands the grieving process.

Remember too that there are others who understand our pain. This might be a good time to join a support group. There may be no better salve for a spirit wounded by grief than to listen and share with others who understand. It is also true that in sharing our own pain we may help someone else to feel less alone.

It may be that Christ's crucifixion, death and resurrection represent the most powerful bereavement theme of all time; that personal growth, self awareness and a reordering of life's priorities can come through the pain and suffering of grief.

May we let the message of Easter teach us that even in our suffering on earth we can find forgiveness and reconciliation in our hearts. Because in forgiveness lies the renewal, rebirth, and resurrection for the spirit.