

## “Lamentation”

Homily of October 29, 2006

by Fr. Brian Timoney

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In many cultures, public grieving, public expression of grief, lamentation is the common place. In the Bible, we have the Book of Lamentations, five poems expressing deep grief over the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 587 before Christ. In Gaelic literature, there is an entire category devoted to lamentation, poems about grief. They are called “Caointe.” And about one hundred years ago, an Irish wake in some parts of the country didn’t consist just in barrels of Guinness. It involved hiring professional mourners, women who would come and wail and lament and list all the good things about the dead person.... public grieving.

In our modern Western culture, loud expressions of grief, loud expressions of loss, that’s all frowned upon. And we are taught, men especially, to put on a stoic face. Dry your eyes. Be a man. We are expected then to face life like that, to bottle up our grief, even though our hearts might be breaking. We do not cry out. We do not allow our pain to be seen. And, of course, the absolute no-no would be to cry out to God, to complain to God, to ask God “Why? Why this violence? Why this genocide in Africa? Why are innocent children being shot in school? Why does my loved one suffer from Parkinson’s or Alzheimer’s or Cancer? Why am I myself racked with pain?” No. We don’t ask those questions of God, certainly not aloud. We are told to put a brave face on all of this, to bear up, not to question God.

And all of this is just so contrary to all of Scripture. I’ve mentioned the Book of Lamentations. We find somewhat the same in the Book of Job. And Jesus himself, in the Garden of Gethsemane, cried out to God, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? If it be possible, let this chalice pass from me.” And today in the gospel passage, we have the deep cry from the heart of the blind man, Bartimeus, “Jesus, son of David, have pity on me,” a repeated cry, a cry that could not be silenced by the crowd. So he repeats, “Son of David, have pity on me.” And it’s only when Bartimeus found the courage to express his sense of loss, his grief, it’s only then that healing could take place.

Yes, grieving, lamenting, can be a very healing process. Those who are participating in our parish grief support group, I am sure, would attest to that. That group is moderated by Sister Joanne and Father Aidan, but they do not do the healing. The healing that takes place is a result of the freedom given to express grief publicly and to share it with others who likewise grieve. Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Yes. It’s OK. It’s OK to question God, to say to God, “This isn’t fair. Why did you allow this to happen?” Do you remember when Jesus’ friend Lazarus died and Martha met Jesus and she said, “If you’d been

here, my brother wouldn't have died." In other words, she was saying, "Where were you when we needed you?" How often do we feel like saying the same thing to God? Where were you when we needed you? Where are you when we need you?

There is one thing, however, that I don't think God would want of us. And that is he wouldn't want us to say to someone who is grieving, someone who has just suffered a great loss, "It's God's holy will." Nonsense. Is God a monster? Is God a sadist? Is God a torturer? Does God deliberately want a little baby to suffer? I don't think so. I don't think so. If we mean, by "God's will," that God wants us to accept our human condition and the laws of nature and the vagaries of accident, then maybe.... maybe we could say it's God's will. But when Jesus said, "Not my will, but thine be done," he was not implying that God actually wanted him to be tortured and crucified. What Jesus was doing was accepting that fidelity to his mission would arouse the hatred of many and inevitably lead to his torture and death. But, in the best Biblical tradition, he felt that he could complain to God and that he could struggle to find meaning in all of that, and to find out what purpose God had for him in his life.

That's a very Biblical approach, to talk to God in an honest, sincere way and we believe in a God who pays attention to us children who are dearly loved. So, why not lament, why not cry out? This indeed is a prayer. Our cry is a prayer. It's honoring God in a very special way. It's saying to God, "I acknowledge that you are a God who listens, that you are a God who cares, that you are a God who loves." The blind man, Bartimeus....Oh, they tried to silence him, but he would not be silenced. His shout was a prayer. It was a prayer that was heard. We join his prayer today. Jesus, son of David, have pity on us. Jesus, son of David, have pity on me. Amen.