

HOMILY ALL SOULS DAY 2019

The next winter Olympic Games are in Beijing in February of 2022. I love the Winter Olympics. My favorite sport in the Winter Olympics is figure skating. I do not know much about the technical aspects of the sport, but I can spot the skaters who are really exceptional. When the skaters are really good, they become one with the music. They just glide across the ice and move and spin and jump. And sometimes, in the midst of their skating, they fall. They stop momentarily. And after that momentary stop, they get up and they continue. Sometimes I wonder how they can get up and go on. I mean, they knew that a fall significantly hurts their chances of winning a medal, but they get up and continue. I think they are able to do this because they hear the music and they are able to go on. I think that this is kind of like what happened to each of us this past year. Our lives were skating along well and at some point we fell. Someone we loved died and our lives stop. At that point we asked ourselves how we were going to go on. We need to listen for the music, because it goes on, life goes on. If we can hear the music, we can join back in with life. If you cannot hear the music, reach out to someone who loves you and they will sing it to you. Ask them and they will help you to go on living.

It is very difficult to cope with the loss of someone we love. Someone very special in our lives is no longer with us physically, and we miss them. It hurts. The grieving process takes a long time. In general, it takes about 3-5 years, and it is painful. If the death you experienced was sudden, a death that you did not expect, you could have been in shock for months. Even if it was a death you expected, at first it does not seem real. It just does not seem like it really happened. After my Mother died I cannot tell you how many times I picked up the phone and called her. It was like I forgot that she had died. Our culture does not recognize that grieving takes time. Our culture tells us that you have 3-5 days for the funeral and the burial, and then you back to life as normal. But of course, we cannot do that. Our lives are never going to be the same again. We need to find our new normal, and that takes time. And I do not think the loss ever goes away. I do not think it is right to say that we get over the

loss, but it does become more familiar, and we are able to live with it better. We are able to heal. We are able to find our new normal. We are able to feel joy again. We will be able to continue living.

Today in the Gospel reading we hear the good news of our faith. Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus has destroyed death forever. Jesus has saved us. We heard an account of what happened the first time that Jesus appeared to someone after he rose from the dead. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene. Mary is a woman of tremendous faith. Mary loved Jesus very much and she grieved his loss, but she grieved as a person of faith. I think that we can learn a tremendous amount from Mary about how to grieve as people of faith. It is our faith that gives us tremendous hope in times like this.

Then we first meet Mary in this Gospel passage, we find her at the tomb early in the morning while it is still dark. Why is Mary there? Mary loved Jesus and I think she just wanted to be as close to him as she possibly could be. At the tomb was probably that place for Mary. We are physical people, and sometimes we need to go to a place where we feel close to a loved one. When my Mother died, for me it was her house because I could feel her presence there. We are physical people, and sometimes we need to go to a special place to feel close to our loved one. It was the cemetery for Mary; it was a house for me. It could be a special restaurant, a park, a museum. Some place where you feel close to your loved one. Sometimes we are inclined to avoid these places, because we think it will be too hard to go there. I think we need to go to all of these places to be comforted.

Sometimes, after someone we love dies, we feel as though we are alone in the dark, just as Mary did that first Easter morning. Sometimes, after the funeral is over it seems as though everyone else has gone on with his or her lives except you. Sometimes we feel alone, but this is not true. Mary soon became distressed when she recognized that Jesus' body is no longer there. When she became distressed, what did she do? She ran and told the disciples. She reached out to her friends for help. We have to do this as well. None of you were at the funeral for your loved one alone, were you? People came not just out of respect for your loved one who has died; they came to support you. How many people told you during the time of the wake and the funeral: "If there is anything that I can do

for you please let me know.” They said that because they meant that. When you need that support, you have to run to them like Mary did. People want to help but sometimes they do not know how. You have to tell them. Sometimes the people that are grieving the loss of the same person as you cannot help you because they are grieving to. And if you do not want to ask friends or relatives, grief counseling is available at Angela Hospice. They have group and individual counseling. It is free. Your loved one who died did not have to be connected with Angela Hospice before they died for you to qualify for the counseling.

Mary was at the tomb weeping. The angels and Jesus at the tomb both ask her the same question: “Why are you weeping?” They do not tell her to stop weeping. That is what we need to do as human beings. We need to feel the pain and the loss so that the healing process can begin. We need to care for our wounds. It is like when you cut your leg. If you just ignore it, if you just pretend that it does not hurt, what is likely to happen? It will probably get infected and get worse, right? If we want it to heal we need to look at the cut, clean it, maybe put some ointment on it, maybe bandage it. We need to care for the wound and it will get better. It is the same thing with our emotional pain. We need to talk about it and care for ourselves and let others care for us. And this is a process. Sometimes we think we are doing really well and all of a sudden something hits us and we feel back where we started. There will be some ups and downs in grieving. This is part of the process. We need to be patient with ourselves. We need to keep telling the story until we do not need to tell it anymore.

What happens next? Mary sees Jesus but she does not recognize him. Then when he calls her by name: “Mary,” she recognizes him. I think that Jesus chose Mary to appear to first, because he knew of her great faith. He knew that she would accept and believe what she was seeing. Your loved ones may make their presence known to you. You may miss it if you are not open to it. Sometimes it is just an overwhelming feeling that your loved one is with you. Sometimes something happens and you just know that your loved one had a hand in it. Sometimes they will come to you in a dream. Sometimes you intuitively get a message and you just know it is from them. When we have these

experiences, we tend to do two things. We can accept it as the gift it is and move forward with the assurance that our loved one lives on and continues to be with us. The second thing that we can do is talk ourselves out of it. That was really just a coincidence. Don't do that. Just accept it as the gift that it is and move forward. There is nothing you can do to create these experiences, and you may not have them, just be open to them.

Mary accepted the appearance of Jesus for the gift it was, but at first she does not want to move on. Jesus tells her: "Stop holding on to me." What Jesus is telling her is that she cannot try and hold on to their relationship as it was in the past. Jesus is telling her that he will still be with her, but in a different way. She needs to move on and find a new way of relating to him on a spiritual level. That is what we need to do as well. We have to find new ways to relate to our loved one, a new way of living with our memories. This year is a difficult one. It is a whole year of firsts. This will be: the first birthday without Mom; the first thanksgiving without a spouse; the first Christmas without a child. These are very difficult firsts. We will never be able to capture what we had in the past when our loved one was with us physically. It is really important that you try to do something different, especially on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Do something different. Start a new tradition. My first Christmas without Mom was very difficult. I had spent every Christmas of my life gathered at Mom's house with my family. I knew I could not do that. So I went to New York and spent Christmas with my brother and his family. I observed Christmas, but in a totally different way. That is what you need to do. You have to observe these events. If you just ignore them, you will have to deal with them next year for the first time. You still have time to make a plan. Do something that makes sense in your life. Invite someone new, go someplace different, or spend the day in a different way. You need to celebrate the holidays even if you do not feel like it. You cannot recapture what you had in the past. We started doing something at St. Edith several years ago, and we are going to do it again this year. On Saturday, November 30th after the 5:00 Mass, we are going to have a bereavement Christmas gathering in the chapel. Each of you will receive an invitation. You will be invited to bring a

Christmas Tree Ornament in memory of your loved one. You can bring an ornament with their name on it, one of the ornaments that belonged to them, something that is meaningful to them, whatever you want. You will be given the opportunity to tell your story about the ornament. I think it is really important to tell the stories. We will be adding these ornaments to our Memorial Christmas trees, on Christmas and every year we will bring out these ornaments to decorate the tree, and we will add new ones to the tree each year. Each year there will be a special memorial here for your loved one. Please join us on November 30th.

What happens next? Jesus gives Mary a commission. He tells her to go and spread the good news that Jesus has risen from the dead. Mary carries on with the work that Jesus has called her to do. Mary listened and heard the music. She got up and continued to live. All of us are still here because we have work to do. We have to carry on and do God's work. Sometimes we may have the feeling that we just do not want to go on but God has a plan for us. We can feel joy again. We each need to listen and hear the music. We need to follow the example of Mary Magdalene and grieve as people of faith and continued to live.