

HOMILY ALL SOULS DAY 2018

My favorite sport in the Winter Olympics is figure skating. It is really quite beautiful and graceful. 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. The skaters and the music become one; do you know what I mean? 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 in part because the music keeps playing. They hear the music and they are able to go on. If they just listen to the music, they can go on skating.

I think that this is kind of like what happened to each of us this past year. Our lives were going on ok, and at some point we fell. Someone we loved died. 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. We need to continue. And if you listen and cannot hear the music, you have to find someone to sing it to you. None of you were alone at the funeral. You were all surrounded by people who care about you and want to support you. If you cannot hear the music, they will sing it to you. Ask them.

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, you are likely to go through times where it just 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. Grieving is something that each of us gathered in this church tonight shares with everyone else. We are grieving the loss of a loved one. 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, and she is one of my favorite people in the Bible. 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? She was standing at the foot of the cross when Jesus died. She knew that he was dead. Why is she there alone in the dark? 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. I was

drawn there and I could feel her presence there. Sometimes it was difficult, sometimes sad, but most of the time it was comforting. 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. Is there a particular place where you feel close to your loved one?

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 and all of the activities and all of the things we needed to handle, after all of that is done, it seems as though everyone else has gone on with his or her lives except you. You feel like you are there in the dark alone. In a sense, each one of us who are grieving is grieving alone. Even if a whole group is grieving the loss of the same person, your relationship with them was unique, and each of us grieves a little differently so your grief is unique. No one ever really knows exactly what we are feeling. But in reality we need to realize that we are not alone. That is why it is so important that we gather together the way we are doing today to pray together and support one another. Everyone in this church is grieving the loss of a loved one.

It is dangerous for Mary to be at the tomb by herself that Easter morning. The other disciples realize that, and they have locked themselves in the upper room. But Mary is grieving the loss of Jesus and she just does not care. Sometimes when we are grieving we do not care about anything else. Someone I love just died and I cannot just go on like nothing happened. Sometimes we just do not care about anything else. But 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 reaches 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? I have never celebrated a funeral where only one person came. 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; it is just that sometimes they do not know how. You all have people in your life that are waiting for you to reach out to them. They would be happy to help you. 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. The disciples cared about Mary. They came when she asked them. They may have been so caught up in their own grief that they did not think of her, but they still loved her and came to her when she reached out. Sometimes you think that other people that are grieving the loss of the same person as you can help you. Many times you are all grieving and in different ways and you just cannot help each other.

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 cry and we need to share the tears with others. We need to feel the pain and the loss so that the healing process can begin. We need to talk about our grief with other people. In our society we are too quick to try and dismiss bad feelings and put them behind us. We just cannot move on that quickly. 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

dirty and infected and get worse, right? If we want it to heal, if we want it to get better, we need to acknowledge it, look at it, clean it, maybe put some Neosporin 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 attend to it, we need to acknowledge it and take care of it so that it gets better. Sometimes we think we are doing really well and all of a sudden something hits us and it seems as though we have not moved forward at all. We are moving forward, this is just part of the process. We need to be patient with ourselves. We need to share our thoughts and feelings with others. We need to take time to heal. We need to ask ourselves why we are weeping, and attempt to turn that over to Jesus so that he can heal us. We need to tell the story to Jesus and to other people. We need to keep telling the stories until we do not need to tell them 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 will make their presence known to you. It may be in a way that you do not expect. You may miss it if you are not watching for it. Some of you here have told me about the experiences that you have had. Experiences where you know that your loved one is trying to tell you that they are ok. 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. I am sure many of you have stories. I would like to invite you to share them with me and with each other at the reception that immediately follows this prayer service.

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. We need to figure out how you are going to live on each day with their memory as part of our day. 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 with 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, and you need to move on. You cannot recapture what you had in the past. We started doing something new at St. Edith several years ago, and we are going to do it again this year. On

Sunday, December 9th at after the 11:00 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, 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 December 9th.

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. Jesus has conquered death forever, and Mary must share this with others and help them to figure it out. 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, that we cannot 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.