

On Death XVII

The very necessary process of grief and its goal, acceptance.

Dr. Elizabeth Kubler Ross's pioneering work "On Death and Dying" describes grief as a process we all go through when someone we love has died. There are several stages: denial, bargaining with God, anger, and finally acceptance. According to her research we all go through all of these phases both as we approach death, and as we stand by one who is dying. Grief is essential, and if we are not able to grieve, we will be unable to come to acceptance. Often there is "unfinished business" with the dying person; perhaps there is need for forgiveness and there are things that need to be said. Sometimes as with my Mom it isn't a big long emotional moment, but something simple, that brought her to terms with death. For others the conversation might be quite extended. When a person has died before "unfinished business" is concluded, the one who remains feels as though they are stuck and can't move on. For Catholics this should not present a problem; we believe that the dead "hang around" for a while, and that things can still be spoken to them. Even in the hospital we would advise families of dying patients to speak to them even though they were in a coma. According to the best scientific research the sense of hearing is the last to go. At least in prayer, one can say what needs saying even when the beloved has already died. Grief is work, and there is no short cut: doing the work of grief can lead those who remain to acceptance and resolution. Finally one of the really important tasks for Catholics is to remember their beloved dead at God's Altar. This was the one request St. Monica made of her son St. Augustine: "remember me at God's Altar." This is amazingly comforting, and so for the long haul.

IHM Pray for us.

Fr. Jerry