
The time around someone dying can be very busy for those left behind. Registering the death, getting pieces of paper in order, visits to the undertaker and from the clergy – all have to be juggled at a time when there seem to be a thousand other things to do.

The funeral itself can be stressful: setting the right tone, hoping all will go to plan, skating (not always successfully) over the cracks in relationships, families, and memories.

Then after the funeral it can be devastatingly quiet. The phones, which did not seem to stop ringing, have gone silent. The avalanche of people, cards, flowers, and other tributes has stopped. It can be lonely. People seem to avoid you. If they do meet you they seem to be grasping for the right words. Bereavement can make you feel isolated and sad.

This is the time beyond death and dying, a time when the full impact of what has happened hits home. There are many distractions and temptations that present themselves but time and again you come back to the isolation. Into the midst of all this can come some unwelcome if not unexpected guests: your emotions. The trouble with them is that you cannot predict

‘Easter marks not only Jesus overcoming death and coming back to life but his staying alive and being with us forever, in our earthly lives and after our deaths.’



their nature – tears, anger, frustration, depression, and plain numbness – or the time of their arrival. These can vary, sometimes because of the very circumstances of a death.

What does the Christian faith have to offer at times like this? A word of warning: just saying what follows may not make it true for you, and someone else saying it can be annoying.

However, the story of Jesus is one of accompaniment. No one need ever be alone. How can that be? It is a story told in three parts.

First, Jesus was born as one of us. That means something amazing. The all-powerful God, beyond everything and in everything at the same time, was born as a helpless child. By this we can know that God came to share and knows about our life.

Second, Jesus was betrayed to suffer and die a miserable death on the

cross at Calvary just outside the city of Jerusalem. That means God knows about pain, suffering, and death. This is not an intellectual comprehension. He understands because he went through them in human flesh.

The third aspect is captured in the events of Easter Sunday, events remembered and celebrated by Christians each Sunday and every time they break bread in Holy Communion. Easter marks not only Jesus overcoming death and coming back to life but his staying alive and being with us forever, in our earthly lives and after our deaths.

In the loneliness of grief and mourning that message of hope can feel a long way away. Yet it is there and remains for us, understood like this: God reaches out to each and every one of us in love. It applies to those who have died in the past, to those of us here now, and to all of us forever.

Prayer, difficult as it may seem, can help too. You can ask the priest who took the funeral to pray for you. Or you might like to join other Christians at prayer, especially when they gather to celebrate in the Eucharist the three aspects of the Jesus story: his life, his death, and his life beyond death and dying.

Some traditional prayers, such as the Lord's Prayer or the Hail Mary, can be helpful. Or even ones you make up yourself to hold before God the person you love and see no longer.

Beyond Death and Dying

Christian Life

The following simple prayers might be useful:

Rest eternal grant unto (say the person's name), O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.

or

Abide with us, Lord Jesus, so that we may abide with you.

FURTHER READING

John 11: 1-44 and 14: 1-7;
Philippians 2: 5-11

Father of all,
we pray to you for those we love
but see no longer:
**Grant them your peace;
let light perpetual
shine upon them;**
and in your loving wisdom
and almighty power,
**work in them the good
purpose of your
perfect will;**
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

gospel | imprint[®]
⊕

Christian Faith
Christian Life
Christian Prayer

www.gospelimprint.com

