

SOLACE
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EIGHT

IT IS AN ACT OF LOVE: TO:

Bury the Dead, Comfort the Sorrowful

Gather

OPENING PRAYER

Merciful God, the death of your Son, Jesus, broke the bonds of death for us and opened for us the way to everlasting life. We pray for our loved ones who have gone before us into your care. We miss them. Still, we trust your unfailing love for them and rely on your strength to sustain us as we continue to live in your saving hope. Amen.

Report on Actions

Scripture Reflection

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the LORD for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

-Isaiah 25:6a, 7-9

-How does God wipe away our tears?

-How do you wait on the Lord?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Introduction

It is a Work of Mercy to honor the body of the dead with special prayers and rituals. In *Reflections on the Body, Cremation, and Catholic Funeral Rights* (1997), the US Council of Catholic Bishops note that in burying the dead we remember: "This is the body once washed in Baptism, anointed with the oil of salvation, and fed with the bread of life. This is the body whose hands clothed the poor and embraced the sorrowing."

It is also a Work of Mercy to comfort those who are affected by death. Bereavement and grief are natural processes which must run their course. The time it will take to complete this process varies from person to person. There is no time limit which is appropriate for all.

When a loved one dies, we who remain may experience a multitude of emotions. We may feel overwhelmed or hopeless. Our faith may be tested. C.S. Lewis described the flood of emotions he felt upon the death of his wife, in *A Grief Observed*:

"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing.... At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty. If only they would talk to one another and not to me. "

There can be comfort in the prayers, rituals, and customs surrounding the funeral of a loved one. These traditional practices allow family members to be carried forward in the arms of those who are not so profoundly affected. When we visit the funeral home, send flowers and food, and help with expenses, we "suffer with" those who mourn, the real meaning of the word "compassion."

However, it is in our faith that the true comfort of the bereaved lies. The hope that distinguishes Christian grief has its basis in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. St. Paul, in his letter to the Thessalonians

proclaimed: "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died" (1 Thess 4:14). Paul adds, "Therefore encourage one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:18). Christians are called to respectfully bury the dead and compassionately comfort the sorrowful, looking with hope toward eternal life.

Observe

1. What services are offered by churches, funeral homes, and cemeteries in your community?
2. What are the funeral customs of your culture? Research the funeral customs of another culture.
3. Share an experience at a death or funeral of a loved one.
4. What do you tell children about death?

Judge

1. Should it be difficult for Christians to talk about death? Why or why not?
2. What can we do for the living when someone dies? How do we comfort the sorrowful?
3. How does hope of life after death bring comfort as we face death?
4. How should we live if we have hope of life after death?

Act

1. Commemorate the anniversary of a death with a card, Mass offering, donation in the person's name, or visit to the family.
2. Volunteer to serve at a parish funeral as a reader, music minister, or usher. If your parish has a bereavement ministry, participate, perhaps by helping with a funeral luncheon.
3. Provide a meal for a family who has experienced a death.
4. Make prior arrangements for your funeral or do this as a couple.
5. Watch the movie *Taking Chance* (2009) or read Tobit 1:17-18 and 12:12 Consider how God might be calling you to honor the dead and comfort the sorrowful.

Status Update

“@cfmact It is an act of love to bury the dead and comfort the sorrowful”
#ChristianFamilyMovement

Look Ahead to the Next Meeting

1. Date _____
2. Time _____
3. Place
4. Phone or e-mail host if you cannot attend
5. Look ahead to the Observe section for the next meeting.
6. Who could we invite to join our group?

CLOSING PRAYER

Into your hands, O Lord, we humbly entrust our brothers and sisters who have died. In this life, you embraced them with your tender love. Welcome them into paradise, where there will be no sorrow, no weeping nor pain, but the fullness of peace and joy. We pray also for all who have experienced the death of a loved one. May we find ways to be sources of comfort and support to them. And in our time of grief, send us brothers and sisters in faith to comfort us in turn. We ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit. Amen.