

# In grief, give your anger and confusion to God

Prior to my current position as chaplain to Evergreen Catholic Schools, I spent 10 years working as a parish youth minister at both Holy Family Parish (St. Albert) and Holy Trinity Parish (Spruce Grove).

Like any parish team member, I was often asked to support the work of the parish through extra duties which were not part of my normal job description. Normally this was something simple like altar serving at a funeral, some simple tech support, or occasionally going in a little early to unlock the church for a meeting.

In January of 2008, my pastor asked me to take on an extra duty which would become one of the hardest things I've ever had to do in ministry. He needed someone who could, from time to time, lead the vigil prayers which take place the evening before a funeral. Practically speaking, these are short and straightforward Liturgies of the Word which can easily be led by a member of the clergy or a layperson.

The first of these was a beautiful experience. I led prayers for a 90-something woman who had died praying the rosary, surrounded by her family. I remember looking out at the faces of her children and grandchildren, and in the midst of the sadness, there was a lot of peace. It was a privilege to be a part of their grieving, and I found it very easy to find words to share with her family.

The second and the third prayer service were nothing like the first. Both involved the sudden and unexpected deaths of young people – young people whose families I knew through the parish youth ministry. As you might imagine, these families were feeling *anything but* peace at the loss of their loved ones. They were devastated and some were angry. I struggled tremendously to find words to share with these families.

I've been remembering this experience while learning the details of the Humboldt Broncos bus accident this weekend. As you certainly know, this tragedy has cost 15 lives – many of them young people – and has impacted countless others. And much like my experience 10 years ago, there are people who are devastated and likely some who are angry. Even in the midst of the Easter season, it can be difficult to find the faith to respond to this sort of tragedy.

Going back 10 years, I knew that simply explaining the virtue of hope or the wonders of the resurrection seemed insufficient. I was fairly certain that simply quoting the Beatitudes would get me punched in the face. So I consulted my pastor, my spiritual director, and a few youth ministry colleagues before

choosing to focus my reflection on John 11.

In John 11, we learn that one of Jesus' friends, Lazarus, was critically ill. Lazarus' sisters Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus letting Him know of the illness, and hoping He would do for them what he has done for so many others: bring hope and healing. But it says that Jesus "stayed two days longer in the place that he was" (John 11:6) before making His way to the home of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Upon His arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus was already dead and buried – but it is here that the story really begins.

We hear that Martha came out to meet Jesus and said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you" (John 11:21-22). Even in her grief, Martha was still trying to process what's happened through the lens of her faith in Jesus. This led to a beautiful conversation with Jesus about hope and the resurrection.

For Lazarus' other sister, Mary, things were a little different. You might say that the lens of faith had become obscured. When Mary came to meet Jesus, she fell at his feet weeping, and said: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32). While her words were the same, the tone is remarkably different. You can probably imagine that Mary was experiencing a profound sense of loss, confusion, and possibly even anger at the loss of her brother. Rather than engaging her in a conversation about hope, it says that Jesus "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (John 11:33), and asked to be brought to Lazarus' tomb.

Here, we come across the shortest verse in all of Scripture: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Jesus didn't respond to Mary's grief with a parable or a beatitude, or engage her in a theological conversation. He didn't try to find some trite explanation that would help her make sense of her loss. In the face of her overwhelming grief, Jesus wordlessly shared in it by crying with her. He does so even though He understands the resurrection and a few verses later, He would raise Lazarus from the dead.

It is also here in, that shortest verse, that I found my answer 10 years ago – something I wish to share again. Today, there are many who are reading of the Humboldt Broncos tragedy who feel that same sense of loss, confusion, and anger commonly felt by anyone who experiences this type of loss. There is no parable that will make the pain one feels at the loss of a loved one – particularly when that loved one is young – feel better. There is no anecdote or beatitude that will somehow put it all into perspective. It may even seem like you're barely hanging on to faith at all in a moment like that: and that the bit you're hanging on to is full of anger and confusion.

In those moments, give that anger and confusion to God. Yell, scream, curse at Him if you must (He can take it!) – but don't let go of the thread by which you are hanging on to Him. He may seem silent, only because He knows you have a lot

to get out... and God isn't about to rush you. Trust me: He has not abandoned you in this moment that [doesn't make sense](#). He may not have much to say – but He does [weep with you](#).