

A LITURGY FOR GRIEVING WELL

Amidst the Confusion of a Suicide

O Lord of Life, weep with me now,
for I grieve a life interrupted
by the choice of one
who willed to live it no more.

I cannot fathom why this has transpired,
or what they sought to mend
by such a final, sudden end,
instead of reaching out, or hanging on,
or fighting through despair
till hope returned.

Now we who are left are left with questions
for which we have no ready answers.
O Christ, how could it come to this?

This hurt is more than I can cope with
on my own. For it is not just the pain
of searing loss, but the added burden
of the question *Why?*
that I must wrestle through,
perplexed and paralyzed by the shock
of a mystery I cannot comprehend.

This grief is too complex.
It would be far easier
to grieve a death from accident
or disease than it is to face the weight
of this ambiguity—
for it is one thing to hate the cancer
or the car wreck that robs us of a loved one,
but what or whom are we to rage against
for *this* loss, save the one we love,
and have lost, and now grieve?

And to this tangled tension add the shame
of having to explain the way they died,
while never wanting those who hear

to pass judgment on one
whose depth of pain they did not know;
whose last despairing choice
might have been made as one who leaps
from a burning tower to avoid the flames
and who might, even a moment too late,
have regretted or repented of that mistake.

O God, I will forever hate
the choice they made.
But I will forever love them
the same as I did in life,
even in those moments when what I feel most
is an anguished rage at their choice.

Because they were so much more
than one tragic act. If only I could
turn the clock hands back.

IF THE PETITIONER STRUGGLES WITH A SENSE
OF GUILT OR PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY,
ADD THE FOLLOWING:

I feel as if it were my fault somehow,
as if I were the one who failed.
I can't escape the sting of regret
for hurts I can't unmake and words
I can't unsay—a swarming litany
of self-blame—for I cannot shake
the thought that they would not
have carried through, but for some
consequence of what I did or did not do.

After all, if I had noticed more,
listened more, loved better,
wouldn't the one I love still be here?
Is their absence itself not ample evidence
of my own omissions and sins?
O God, what I would not give to live those
hours again, and live them differently.

And so I am left with a tangled weave
of love and pain and shame and anger
and confusion and guilt
and defensiveness and regret;
an impossible knot I could spend
fruitless ages trying to unravel,
as if I could sift the past and find
what I was blind to, or find some thing
deserving of my anger, or even spy
some thread of light
that runs through this shadowed fog,
illuminating a deeper, mysterious, hidden
purpose in this seemingly senseless loss.
But none of this brings any comfort.
The tension in my chest does not resolve.
And seeking somewhere
I can lay the blame leaves me
ever on the verge of lashing out
at everyone and everything.
There is no simple answer
that will ever satisfy.

Because beneath this desperate search
for an answer, all I really want
is to see and hold the one I love;
to have them here restored again to life.
And that one outcome I most desire
is the one I am most utterly denied.

So if there is any peace to find, it must
come from somewhere other than these
fruitless revolutions of my mind.
It must come from you, O Christ.

A SEASON OF SILENCE IS KEPT, AS THE PETITIONER
MEDITATES ON THIS CONFESSION:

If there is any peace to
find, it must come from you, O Christ.

O Most Wounded God, bear these my wounds as
well, and be at work within them.

Take the shattered shards and raw materials
of my grief, and fashion them into a mosaic
of weeping grace; a pattern worked of pain—
but also comfort in the pain.

Comfort your people, O Christ!

Teach us what it means to grieve well
amidst this confusion. Teach us how to
love despite this anguish. By your Spirit,
be at work within our minds and hearts,
enabling us to forgive

and to forgive

and to forgive,

both today and in the days and years to come—
to forgive the one who chose to leave us,
and to forgive ourselves, and to forgive one
another

for any failings we perceive,
and in that slow release, like the
unclenching of a fist, to find that our hope—
fixed in you—is anchored deeper and
stronger than any present heartache.

For you, O Lord,
from the foundation of the world,
loved this one more deeply and perfectly
than we ever will. You created them
to reflect your glory, and though that visage
is marred in each of us by sin,
yet did we catch glimpses of
Your beauty there, in them.

In the mysteries of your sovereignty
you allowed them freedom to make
a harmful, significant, and irreversible choice,
just as you grant each of us agency
to choose that which might harm
ourselves or others.

And yet, that choice does not negate
your great grace, for your grace was ever offered.

And your grief, O Christ, at this
willful cutting off of life, at this giving in
to pain and despair, is greater than our own—for
you alone have carried the full weight
of it, and know the shape and the cry
of the heart of the one who chose such
a barren path. And so we plead and intercede,
asking that your mercies eternally cover
their sins, and our own as well.

Remind us, O Christ,
both now and in the days to come,
that even a tragic end does not upend
the good that came before it.
This solitary act of pain was but
a single line in the story of a lifetime.
Our love and friendship were real.
And the hope and the joy and the
laughter and delight inscribed
on those earlier pages remain forever
in the larger story, as gloriously true
as they ever were.

Let us not forget then, in our present grief,
the fixed history of the many graces
so long manifest in, and through,
and to the one whose loss we grieve.
Let us over time reawaken to the
tender memories of more and more
of those good, bright things,
for such joys are of greater collected weight
than the one choice made in a moment
when the soul was overwhelmed;
and at the redemption of all things,
those memories, for which we are so thankful,
will surely prove more eternal
than all our present tears.

Now into our grief, speak grace, O Father.
Into our chaos, speak comfort, O Christ.
Into our pain, speak peace, O Spirit.

For you alone, O Triune God,
can sustain our souls and our hopes
amidst these crashing swells and
reverberations of pain and confusion.

Shield and cradle us now and forever
in your undying love, O Lord,
our rock and our redeemer.

All our hope is in you.

Amen.