

Lenten Reflection

Hope in Suffering: The Spirituality of Life and Loss

Triune love waits to be discovered in our hearts. We hope that with these reflections, we can awaken to God's desire for our lives and be propelled outward.

The booklet *Hope in Suffering* provides an outline that will allow us to reflect for seven weeks, creating space to ponder on the suffering and loss of our past and current reality that moves our lives into what is emerging and prophetically embracing the Paschal Mystery into our lives.

Each week of Lent, beginning with Ash Wednesday, we will send a weekly reflection via email. You may also download all the reflections in a single pdf file ([click here](#)) for personal and communal use.

If you are interested in the booklet *Hope in Suffering*, it is free to download ([click here](#)) and for personal and communal use.

Timetable

Week One (Ash Wednesday)

Creating a tapestry of life, loss, and hope.

Week Two

God's desire for wholeness.

Week Three

Embrace rather than resist.

Week Four

Journey of life and loss.

Week Five

Moving forward to integration.

Week Six

Entering the mystery.

Week Seven

Embracing hope.

An offering from the Leadership Collaborative, prepared by Elia Cardenas, D. Min. and Pat Murray, CSJ. Based on the document, *Hope in Suffering: The Spirituality of Life and Loss*. For more information, visit www.thelcglobal/resources



Week One

Creating a tapestry of life, loss, and hope.

We may experience the loss of literal life, the loss of what was, or the loss of the very institutions that support the fabric of our lives. As a global society, we are watching the crumbling of governmental systems, witnessing the ever-growing gap between the wealth holders and those suffering from poverty, the devastation of the planet, and the experience of a global pandemic. As a Church, we lost the ideals of security and integrity due to the ills of clericalism, racism, abuse scandals, and division of what it means to be a church.

As people of faith, we are losing the idealism of what was, letting go of institutions that held enormous promise and accomplishment. On a personal level, the loss of physical ability, loss of loved ones, and loss of what I thought I had envisioned for my life are staggering and difficult to embrace, let alone see creative potential and possibilities in this dynamic.

Reflection

- ☞ How do we create space to respect the suffering and loss of our past and current reality?
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

O God of our Consolation, be with us as we name and face our losses. Help us remember that at the root of our feelings of loss is the love we have known. We thank you for all the blessings you have poured out on us that have caused our heart to fill with love.

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Week Two

God's desire for wholeness.

Creation's greatest movement is toward regeneration and wholeness. In this movement, God enters our lives and is in a relationship with us. God, as Creator, moves us toward regeneration and wholeness. Through the process of living the tension of life and loss, we move closer to our authentic self – toward wholeness. In so doing, we move closer to God and the unique creature God desires us to become. Yet, ~~our~~ white-dominant Western culture tells us to avoid this tension, creating an imbalance, and thus we are conditioned to focus on life and avoid confronting loss.

Even though our brains are programmed to avoid pain, pain is the crucible in which one is made whole. This metaphor speaks a truth that needs greater awareness in our society. The crucible holds the unrefined metal, and by applying high temperature, the impurities from the metal are separated and taken out. This is like the process of unresolved loss. Eventually, the pain begins to subside, and we move toward understanding what has occurred and how life will differ. Pain is needed to create the process of purification and the movement toward wholeness, toward our authentic self.

Reflection

- ☞ Do you have an unresolved loss? How do you invite God into those most tender spots?
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

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Week Three

Embrace rather than resist.

In the first part of the 21st century, consecrated life, family life, and social institutions are going through a radical adjustment. From its very inception, Christianity and the Catholic Church have changed. Yet, we often hold to what is now as if it is how it has always been.

We experience the slow churning of change every day; it never ceases in its movements. Yet, we also try to deny that it is happening. We make every attempt to slow down change, to pretend that change is not real. Sometimes we pretend that our current Motherhouse is the only Motherhouse we have had. But, if we do not face the reality of change and grieve the loss of what is no longer, we move toward stagnation, which is a stalling of life-giving energy.

Our life task is to move toward the generative impulse of life-giving energy, which enables us to reach beyond ourselves and be of service to others. In essence, it is to be love incarnate in the world. Unresolved loss is a barrier to this impulse because we are called to be the outpouring of Christ's love in our world; our own suffering, death, and resurrection bring us to greater wholeness.

Reflection

- ☞ How is God inviting you to embrace change and move toward resurrection?
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

O God of Wholeness, help us to see our past with new eyes. Help us to see those times when our pain and loss have opened the way for new life. Help us to grow constantly in that new life.

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Week Four

Journey of life and loss.

Either journey is difficult and takes energy. It may seem counterintuitive to embrace pain and suffering – if nothing else, it is extremely unpleasant! However, think about taking a road trip. You have fueled the car and only have so much energy (fuel) to get you to a destination. There are two options. The first is a difficult drive on some narrow roads; however, the destination is a beautiful beach. The other option is a more comfortable stretch of road; however, the destination is a dormant, walled-off garden. Both take energy and result in very different realities.

If we do not work to resolve the impact of change and loss, these realities continue to use the energy we could use for other, more life-giving pursuits. Unattended losses build up and accumulate. It could be the death of someone, disappointment over something not happening, a collective choice that did not sit well with you, a diminished hope, or the loss of an ability. Loss can also be from a positive change, such as a desired shift in ministry or a move to a new living situation. These also create stress in our life that needs to be addressed.

Reflection

- ⌘ What are some disappointments and losses you have experienced in the past decade?
- ⌘ Think about positive changes as well. What were the losses in these situations?
- ⌘ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ⌘ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ⌘ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

Jesus, you took our pain upon yourself so that we may find wholeness and life to the fullest. Help us to use our life-giving energy to bring about the holiness of others who have shared our losses.

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Week Five

Moving forward to integration.

If a loss is not processed and it begins to layer upon other losses, emotions such as fear, anger, and resentment are often the avenue of its expression. These and other emotions arise, and we do not know why. They stem from the buildup in the unconscious of all the losses to which we did not pay attention.

We did not want to see them, deal with them, or give them time. However, they want to be seen, and if the only way they can be noticed is to go underground and maneuver in the depths, this is what they will do. Think of the children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, in which the night brings the wilds of imagination to work out the issues of the day. Unresolved loss is like these little monsters wanting attention.

If we do not do the work to befriend them, we are left with a loss of hope. We can barely find our deepest selves in the layers of unresolved losses, resentments, and disappointments. These fill the space that the hopeful and creative energy needs to flourish.

Reflection

- ☞ Let us start with the most important question in the face of loss: What is your choice?
- ☞ Do you let the moment confine you, or do you allow it to free you for new possibilities?
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

O God of Healing, help us to recognize the pain of our losses and allow you to enter into that pain with us. We know that it is only with your healing power that we may befriend our losses and find the light of hope again.

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Week Six

Entering the mystery.

Knowing that we are people invited into the reality of the paschal mystery – embodying the dying and rising in our lives – we open ourselves to the pain and the suffering of the cross, and we then allow life to re-inhabit our bodies, the resurrection.

Saint Augustine proclaimed that “we are Easter People, and Alleluia is our song!” We are called to grieve more profoundly and deeply because we know our life is grounded in God and the paschal mystery. Yet, as Christians, we are in a world that promotes a denial of death, covering up the reality of a loss by moving on quickly, not allowing a full grieving process, and ignoring the grief of others. Grief is the normal but bewildering cluster of ordinary human emotions arising in response to a loss, intensified and complicated by the relationship to the person or the object lost.

Given this is the inevitable nature of our lives, whether collectively or individually, we are then called to risk entering the paschal mystery. This redemptive nature of suffering and movement toward the impulse of resurrection reminds us of the cyclical nature of the paschal mystery.

Reflection

- ☞ How do you navigate around and resist facing the reality of change, loss, and grief??
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

O God of our Longing, be with us as we prepare to enter into Holy Week. Be our strength and our guide as we embrace our losses. Help us to recognize the life that comes through loss.

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Week Seven

Embracing hope.

We carry the somberness of grief and risk being countercultural. We can do this because we have the assurance that God suffers with us. God is the rock on which we stand – especially amid difficulty. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus affirm that God is not apathetic but rather a faithful comforter. As we carry grief and loss, we shall be comforted by this faithful comforter.

God calls us to lament – to cry out. In this active process of lamenting, we become hopeful because we are not alone; we are getting the grief out and being transformed by the experience. This hope is contained in the process of healing. Every person has the instinct to heal – we have what we need – we need to access it, listen to it – we are active participants.

By doing something, we can focus on the intrapersonal aspects of our lives and respond to the urgent need to hear what is within. We are compelled by God's desire for us to befriend our interior life to ensure energy is available for life-giving pursuits. Grounded in God's extravagant love, we can grieve and risk holding onto hope. We can truly risk entering the paschal mystery knowing our lives rest in the abundant love of God.

Reflection

- ☞ As you enter the Paschal Mystery: What is your ultimate hope, and what are you willing to risk, bringing this hope into greater consciousness for ourselves and the world?
- ☞ Reflect on your own experiences in life, community, ministry, and family.
- ☞ Pay attention to what is stirring within you and take a moment to write in a journal what emerges: words, memories, and emotions.
- ☞ Notice where you experience resistance and what captures your attention, as these are an invitation from God to look into ourselves.

Prayer

O Faithful Comforter, as we prepare to enter into the Paschal Mystery, that after the suffering is the hope of a new life. After our sadness, there is a joy that brings us life-giving energy - the energy of your love which we are called to share.

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