

I. BASIC PATIENT DATA

Chaplain – Robert Baral

Patient's Name – XY, 60+ year old male, married

length of Visit–60 min;

Unit- medical/surgical

Religion-Quaker.

Significant Others – wife Z @ bedside

Theme –

A Couple Mourning Losses of Their Children as They Battle Cancer:

Embracing the Mortal Sins of Abortion and Homosexuality in an Apostate Church Diminishes Coping and Impedes The Grief Process.

II. FACTS OF THE CASE

This is a referral from the hospital Palliative Care Team. The patient, Mr. Y, is newly diagnosed with lymphoma. It is possible this patient will die from the cancer. He is a Vietnam War Veteran and credibly believes he was exposed to Agent Orange during the war. The patient thus blames the government for his cancer. He also has a new diagnosis of meningitis, Lyme disease, heart problems and Bell's Palsy. The couple lost a son, who died of AIDS as a result of living a homosexual lifestyle. They also lost a daughter due to abortion many decades ago. The patient was reportedly struggling with overwhelming feelings of anger. They are burdened with unresolved complex grief.

III. CHAPLAIN'S PREPARATION

I knew from report the day before that the patient was struggling with anger issues. I sat at the Nurse's station while the Doctor finished his visit with the couple. I felt anxious and fearful. Would they focus their anger on me? I've discovered in Ministry that sometimes people focus unresolved anger at GOD against those who come in His Name to offer solace. If they did, how would I handle it? I remind myself to never take such things personally. Sometimes the Chaplain just can't get through to people. I waited my turn to visit and read silently from a prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, the truth;
Where there is doubt, the faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. AMEN.”¹

IV. INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is a 2 bed room, the patient’s bed is by window. The patient is sitting upright, feet up in bed. An older woman, identified to me by the Doctor as the wife Mrs. Y, is sitting at the foot of the bed. She is facing the window, her hand on her husband’s legs. The curtain is drawn between beds. I had expected anger, but their faces are gentle. We make immediate good eye contact. I shake both their hands, patient first, then his wife. They seem willing to allow me to enter their space. They immediately consent to my visit. I sit in a chair facing them in the corner.

V. THE VISIT

C=Chaplain; P=Patient X; W=Wife Z; N=Nurse

C1 - [I knock on door as I enter room cautiously. I pass the patient & family in the 1st bed, smile and nod my head towards them slightly.] Pardon my intrusion.

¹ 1, Saint Francis of Assisi, “Peace Prayer.”

C2 - [I peer slowly around corner of curtain as I enter space of far bed.]

Hello. Mr. and Mrs. Y?

P1 - [The couple make solid eye contact with me.] Yes?

C3 - [I extend my hand to the patient and shake his hand.] Hello Mr. and Mrs. Y. I am Bob, one of the hospital Chaplains here on this floor today.

P2 - [Solid handshake.] Hello.

C4 - [I extend my hand to wife and shake her hand.] I am here to see if you would like me to visit with you both today.

W1 - [I note wife answers first.] Yes. I'm Z.

P3 - Yes, please come in Chaplain Bob. I'm X.

C5 - [I note there is a chair facing bed in corner. I motion to chair. I am entering their space cautiously. Where is this anger I heard of yesterday in report?] May I have a seat here?

W2 - Sure.

P4 - [Pt nods head.]

C6 - [I sit down.] Thank you, X and Z. I understand you've just come into the hospital yesterday. I saw from the Nurse's station that you were just meeting with your Doctor.

P5 - Yes. Things are more clear now. They were very confused until today. I didn't know which way things were going.

C7 - [I switch between patient & wife to give them equal eye contact time. I lean forward slightly and intentionally.] How so?

P6 - [Pt explains briefly his chemo therapy was stopped for a few weeks for his cancer while he received treatment for new problems of Lyme Disease and possible meningitis. He keeps good eye contact with me.] They had to stop my chemotherapy for a while because of these other problems, but I'm starting up a ½ dose of my chemotherapy today.

W3 - [Wife sits quietly on edge of bed, hands folded on her lap while her husband talks about his medical conditions.]

C8 - You are relieved that things are back on track and you are able to restart your chemotherapy! I was a soldier in Vietnam and was exposed to 'Agent Orange,' which gave me this cancer.

C9 - [I nod my head as Mr. Y shares. I see he has good understanding of his illnesses. This is going well. I had not expected such an easy conversation. No outward visible wall of anger here now.] One of the terrible consequences of That War!

N1 - [Nurse enters room to give patient medications in preparation for restarting chemotherapy. I greet her and then sit quietly. The couple interact with the Nurse for several minutes.]

C10 - X, I want to say thank you for serving our Country in that war. War brings home many kinds of scars in soldiers.

P7 - Thank you, Chaplain Bob. That means a lot to me! A bad war, but I did my duty.

C11 - [I want to open discussion of spiritual support and resources to explore loss issues.] A part of my service is to see how we can help patients and families get the emotional and spiritual support they feel they need while here at the hospital. I see your Faith is listed as Quaker? Do you have a local Church?

W4 - [Wife begins very in depth sharing of their Faith tradition. She starts with the local history of their Church.] We call it a Quaker Meeting House.

C12 - [I note name and town of their Church. I observe that Faith matters are wife's department.] Do you have a Pastor or someone there that needs to know you are with us?

W5 - We don't have organized Clergy and hierarchy. We believe that we all have the same Light of GOD in us. So we meet and there are long periods of silence. Then if one of us wants to share something, we do.

C13 - [Wonder if I made a faux pas in asking about a Pastor. But apparently not. Wife needs to share and so I give her opportunity.] I see.

W6 - You should come and visit us, Chaplain Bob. You would enjoy it!

C14 - [Z has a need to evangelize me to their Tradition, which gives her a sense of greater reassurance to know that I am attentively listening. This is part of my pastoral care of this couple. I invite her to continue.] Thank you, Z. I appreciate that.

W7 - We are a very close group of about 30 people. Everyone knows about X's illness, but not that he's here in the hospital now. But I will let them know. I'm there almost every day.

C15 - [I wonder if the patient is as connected to their Church as wife is. I probe cautiously] So you both attend there regularly?

P8 - I go sometimes. I use to be Catholic. But the Catholic Church says, if you're gay, you're going to Hell. My wife attended a Lutheran Church. But she's happy with the Quakers, so we go there.

C16 - [I wonder if there may be some disconnect here between husband and wife in faith matters.] The question of the gay lifestyle was a concern to you, so you've left The Catholic and Lutheran Churches and have found a Church home together with The Quakers. How so?

W8 - We're very open and accepting of everyone. We don't exclude anyone, including gays and people who are pro-choice.

C17 - [I wonder why they felt a need to share this with me. I recall in the referral they had lost a son due to AIDS. I choose my words carefully. I don't want to say anything that might add to their burdens. The best way for me to comfort this couple is to walk with them, while remaining authentic to who I am as a faithful Catholic Christian.] You have a very open and accepting Church. Have the issues of abortion and being gay touched your lives in some personal way?

W9 - [Z continues to share re their Quaker Tradition for some time in monologue. She talks of joy of GOD's Love.] Our son died from AIDS 2 years ago. He was gay.

P9 - I think what killed him was a bad blood transfusion tainted with HIV. [X tenses up and sheds a tear.] He was such a good boy. I can't believe that GOD would send him to Hell just for being gay.

C18 - X and Z, I'm so sorry for your loss. I hear that you both love your son a lot.

P10 - X, Junior was our only living child. He left us no grandkids.

C19 - You also mentioned your Church being open to 'Choice?'

W10 - When we were first together, we chose to have an abortion. It just wasn't the right time then for a baby during the war. We named our baby 'Starlight.' We know she's in Heaven with our son. [The couple hold hands.]

C20 - Your hearts tell you both of your children, X Junior and Starlight, are in Heaven together with our Lord JESUS CHRIST. That would mean they are both praying for you together before GOD from Above right now.

W11 - Yes, thank you for saying that, Chaplain Bob! That makes us feel so peaceful to hear you know what we already know! [Both smile at each other and embrace.]

C21 - [X understands his illnesses well and is pleased that he is restarting his chemotherapy. They have a strong Faith support network. They grieve for their deceased children, but have the conviction that they are both safe in Heaven and praying for them.] I see that you have a very deep and beautiful Faith. I know this area had a lot of Quakers that settle here.

W12 - [Wife shifts to history lesson, then shares list of available Quaker Churches in area.] Well, Pennsylvania was founded by Quakers. William Penn himself was a Quaker!

C22 - May I offer you both a short Scripture reading and a prayer?

W13 - I don't know. What would you suggest?

C23 - May I suggest PSALM 23, "The LORD is our Shepherd?"

W14 - Is that the one with "the valley of the shadow of...?"

C24 - Yes, The LORD is my Shepherd by King David of Israel. [I read:]

PSALM 23:1-6

¹ The LORD is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters,

³ He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His Name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your Goodness and Love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of The LORD forever. ²

W15 - What is that one in TIMOTHY about GOD being immortal, eternally and lovingly wise?

C25 – Saint Paul on GOD's great Mercy, majesty and goodness. [I read:]

I TIMOTHY 1:15-17

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: CHRIST JESUS came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst.

¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown Mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, CHRIST JESUS might display His immense patience as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.

¹⁷ Now to The King Eternal, immortal, invisible, The only GOD, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. ³

W16 - Or how about the one, "There is a time for every season?"

C26 – From wise King Solomon, The KOHEL, The Preacher. [I read:]

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

¹ There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

² NIV, PSALM 23:1-6. The KJV Bible translation in verse 4 reads "the valley of death," while The NIV Bible translation of verse 4 reads, "the darkest valley."

³ NIV, I TIMOTHY 1:15-17.

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. ⁴

P11 - [Couple look up at me a little tearful but smiling as they hold hands.]
Thank you, Chaplain Bob. You knew every Scripture GOD gave us to hear!
C27 – These 3 Scriptures are GOD talking to you both about GOD replacing fear with confidence in His protection; about His great Mercy and Glory; about this time being a time of His Peace for you together as one in His Love. [I address both patient & wife, but anticipate wife will take the lead.]
Would you show me and teach me how you pray in your Tradition?

P12 - [Mr. Y sits up on edge of bed and extends his hands, one to me, one to his wife. He is answering “Yes” to me and signaling his wife to lead, submitting to her gentle spirit.]

W17 - [Mrs. Y stands and extends her arms, one to her husband and one to me. She stands over us like a solid rock.]

C28 - [I kneel on one knee between them. I take their hands. Their grips are strong. They do this often together. It flows very naturally for them. I am thankful to be allowed into their lives like this. I recall they favor silence until they have something to say.]

P13 - [X begins. He has short list of things he gives thanks to GOD for.]
Thank you for the Chaplain visiting us. Thank you for this time together.
[I look up. He is crying quietly. He is looking up at his wife and smiling.]

W18 - [Z has a slightly longer list of thanksgiving.]

C29 - [I am being drawn in deeply here. I offer a short prayer for GOD’s blessing and strength for them both. I ask for the prayers of their deceased children, trusting in GOD’s Mercy that they are in Heaven, X, Junior and Starlight. But where most people would end here, they do not let go of my hands. Silence. I remain at my duty station as I am.]

W19 - [X now begins to pray passionately. She is praying with us and also over us. She prays for GOD’s blessings, including me as one with them. When she finishes, only then do they let go of my hands, signaling the end of their prayers.]

⁴ NIV, ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8.

C30 - [I open my eyes and look at them. They are both crying quietly – tears of sorrow, of joy, of release. They continue to hold onto each other, still in love as since they were teenagers. They are smiling at each other and seem to be at much greater peace. A very deep faith in GOD’s Love, which they share with each other. They look to me like high school sweethearts holding hands. I have not confronted, but accompanied. I stand.] X and Z, thank you so much for allowing me to visit with you both today. I am so thankful to have knocked on your door!

C31 - [I extend my hand, first to Mr. Y and then to Mrs. Y.] If either of you need us at any time, for any reason, please just have your Nurse page us. I want to leave you with some support resources, including local Veteran’s support and our hospital grief support group.

P14 - [Mr. X now shakes my hand at length. Solid eye contact with me.] Thank you for visiting with us, Chaplain Bob.

W20 - [Y now shakes my hand at length as well. Also solid eye contact with me.] GOD sent you to us, Chaplain Bob!

C32 - [I feel they are glimpsing into my soul. I am conscious that I am deeply moved.] I am so glad to have met you both. Thank you for letting me be with you today, my friends. May GOD bless. [I exit]

VI. SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT

The patient is focused on desire to restart chemotherapy, which has been interrupted for treatment of meningitis & Lyme’s Disease; Wife focused on sharing their Quaker faith and in prayer. Pastoral discussion turns to loss of one child from AIDS who was living a homosexual lifestyle, and of another child lost when the couple was very young through abortion.

They are worried about the Eternal place of both their deceased children, but were able to explore GOD’s Mercy and finding Hope that their children are in Heaven and praying for them. Leaving Traditional Christian Churches that they feared might not affirm this, they joined The Society of Friends - The Quakers - where their deepest hopes of Heaven for their deceased children are affirmed, and where they do not have to confront the mortal sin nature of homosexuality and abortion, nor own the terrible consequences. This has brought them a shallower grief processing, but paradoxically is effective in giving them a greater peace in the midst of their present heavy struggle.

The patient presented as initially reserved but calm, with no outward signs of anger. His wife is very supportive. They appear to be a close couple still in love after many decades. The patient is submissive to his wife's spiritual direction, who is in charge of their faith journey. Making this visit possible was that I not judge, nor preach, nor challenging their newfound faith world views that brings them some comfort about their deceased children, but rather met them where they are and journeyed with them through the visit as a friend in CHRIST.

Both have strong Christian Faith, which they share together easily as one with me. The patient worshipped formerly as a Roman Catholic, while his wife formerly worshipped as Lutheran. A major task of their grief work – denial, anger, bargaining, sadness – to find some acceptance to cope with the loss of their children – has led them into The Quaker Tradition. The wife's need to talk about their newfound Faith Tradition, where the issues of the relevant mortal sins are not addressed, has allowed the couple to make meaning and find some veneer of acceptance. This has also helped them cope better with the patient's cancer diagnosis, its likely cause and outcome.

VII. PASTORAL SPIRITUAL CARE PROVIDED

1. Obtaining permission to visit; 2. pastoral presence; 3. attentive listening; 4. Reflecting back so they knew they were heard; 5. providing a non-judgmental environment for the couple to share; 6. therapeutic touch using holding of hands; 7. Scripture reading of passages requested by wife; 8. prayer; 9. resources for Veterans' support and grief support; 10. thanks for allowing me to visit; 11. making couple aware of further Chaplain support available and arranged for follow up.

VIII. OBSERVED OUTCOME

1. Couple welcomed my visit, make good eye contact immediately, shook my hand and give permission for me to visit; 2. Wife shares immediately at length about their faith; 3. couple share about painful losses of their 2 children; 4. patient shares a detailed understanding of his illnesses and plan of care; 5. I read Scripture verses as wife requested and provided short application upon their situation; 6. joined couple in prayer according to their Faith Tradition; 7. Couple both crying softly, tearful, holding hands with each other in release of tension and fears; 8. Couple expressed deep thanks for visit and accepted resources and offer of further Chaplain support.

IX. SPIRITUAL ANALYSIS OF THIS COUPLE

The patient is a smart man who understands his illness. I can see him asking these questions: How much suffering will I have to endure? When and how will I die? How will this affect my wife? Time to seek comfort in GOD now and work to strengthen my wife as much as possible in our Faith as I go through these things. The patient had faith that he will go to be with GOD in Heaven when he dies. The patient continues to grieve, a life work that is never complete when a parent loses children, likely hindered by the false gospel from their new Faith community that homosexuality and abortion are not sins. He will continue to struggle with this until he dies.

The wife has a strong outward Faith. I must wonder if her spiritual strength is as strong inwardly, or is this emerging now in face of her husband's ongoing cancer illness and the death of their two children? Suffering, loss and fear in dreaded situations opens the penitent heart to The Love and Mercy of GOD very strongly. She would be asking such questions: Is our son, who died of AIDS likely due to homosexuality, and our daughter who died of abortion, in Heaven with GOD praying for us? The wife also has faith that she will go to Heaven when she dies, even as she also grieves the loss of their children and possible loss of her husband.

X. THEOLOGY AGAINST THE SIN OF HOMOSEXUALITY

The Catechism says, "Love is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."⁵ But the world, the flesh and the Devil have their counterfeits contrary to GOD's Love. The Scripture in I TIMOTHY just before the verses the wife asked me to read is as follows, which I omitted at the bedside:

I TIMOTHY 1:8-11

⁸ We know that The Law is good if one uses it properly.

⁹ We also know that The Law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,

¹⁰ for the sexually immoral, *for those practicing homosexuality*, for slave traders and liars and perjurers - and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

⁵ 3, CCC, # 2392

¹¹ that conforms to The Gospel concerning The Glory of The blessed GOD...⁶

This does not say that the practicing homosexuality must go to Hell. Like all mortal sins, if he repents under the conviction of GOD's Law and receives Divine Mercy in GOD's Grace offered to him, Heaven is open to him. But attending an apostate Church that preaches a false gospel does not open The Doorway to Heaven to the sinner. It enlarges the doorway to Hell. So Moses writes:

GENESIS 5:2

He created them male and female and blessed them. And He named them "Mankind" when they were created.⁷

Building on Moses, The Catechism adds, "By creating the human being man and woman, GOD gives personal dignity equally to the one and the other. Each of them, man and woman, should acknowledge and accept his sexual identity" as offered by The Creator, the binary male or female, which is innate and set at each person's creation.⁸ "CHRIST is The Model of chastity. Every baptized person is called to lead a chaste life, each according to his particular state of life," single, married to a spouse of the opposite sex or ordained.⁹

"Chastity means the integration of sexuality within the person. It includes an apprenticeship in self-mastery" to avoid sexual sin and, when committed, to repent of it and refrain from reoffending The Almighty. ***Among the sins gravely contrary to chastity are masturbation, fornication, pornography, and homosexual practices.***"¹⁰

The Catholic Catechism states, "Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained...."

⁶ 2, NIV, I TIMOTHY 1:8-11.

⁷ 2, NIV, GENESIS 5:2.

⁸ 3, CCC, # 2393.

⁹ 3, CCC, #2394.

¹⁰ 3, CCC, # 2395-2396.

“...Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts *as acts of grave depravity*, Tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are *intrinsically disordered*." They are contrary to The Natural Law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. *Under no circumstances can they be approved.*”¹¹

XI. THEOLOGY AGAINST THE SIN OF ABORTION

Moses records in The Ten Commandments:

EXODUS 20:13:

You shall not murder.¹²

The prophet Jeremiah reveals clearly that GOD forms each human being, from the moment of conception, within the womb:

JEREMIAH 1:5a

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart...¹³

The Psalmist confesses the same miracle by the very hand of GOD:

PSALM 139:13

For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb.¹⁴

That the child is formed at the moment of conception in the mother's womb by GOD, each child is precious in His eyes. To take such a life of an unborn child constitutes *the grave mortal sin of murder*. Therefore CHRIST directs His Apostles to let the little children come to Him, that He may bless them:

¹¹ 3, CCC, # 2357.

¹² 2, NIV, EXODUS 20:13.

¹³ 2, NIV, JEREMIAH 1:5a.

¹⁴ 2, NIV, PSALM 139:13.

MATTHEW 19:14

JESUS said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.”¹⁵

Returning to The Catechism of The Catholic Church, “Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of GOD and it remains for ever in a special relationship with The Creator, Who is its Sole End. ***GOD alone is The Lord of Life from its beginning until its end: no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.***”¹⁶ ***Thus, abortion is murder.***

Therefore, “Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person - among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life...”¹⁷

The prohibition against abortion has been proclaimed from the very earliest Church: “Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. ***Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to The Moral Law...***”¹⁸

The Didache, “The Teachings” from the first Century AD Church, states, “You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish.”¹⁹ GOD, The Lord of Life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. ***Life must be protected with the utmost care from the moment of conception: abortion and infanticide are abominable crimes.***²⁰

¹⁵ 2, NIV, MATTHEW 19:14.

¹⁶ 3, CCC # 2258.

¹⁷ 3, CCC # 2270.

¹⁸ 3, CCC # 2271.

¹⁹ 3, CCC # 2271. Didache 2:2, A Compendium of 1st Century Church Teachings. See further sources CCC # 2271, especially reference no. 75.

²⁰ 3, CCC # 2271. Gaudium Et Spec, Joy and Hope, #51:3. 1 of 4 Pastoral Constitutions of The Second Vatican Council, 1965.

“Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life. *A person who procures a completed abortion incurs excommunication*...by the very commission of the offense, and subject to the conditions provided by Canon Law. The Church does not thereby intend to restrict the scope of Mercy. Rather, She makes clear the gravity of the crime committed, the irreparable harm done to the innocent who is put to death, as well as to the parents and the whole of society.”²¹

People intrinsically know these things, but often try to run from GOD’s Justice, seeking out a cheap grace without repentance, so that they can feel easier in their consciences without redirecting their lives. But that feeling is superficial, like a band-aid on a cancer. It does not cure, but rather obscures GOD’s face from us.

The false gospel that homosexuality and abortion are acceptable by GOD taught to this couple at their apostate Church imprisons their souls under the weights and consequences of these mortal sins. Full confession, penance and absolution within The faithful Church brings deeper healing that would allow this couple to find greater emotional and spiritual peace in the face of their terrible losses with GOD, one another and themselves. As their hospital Chaplain, I was unable to breach these questions in the absence of their inquiry or request.

XII. REVIEW OF THE KUBLER-ROSS GRIEF CYCLE MODEL

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross offers a five-stage model of *Grief* that people typically progress through in processing serious loss: 1. *Denial and Isolation* – “At first, we tend to deny the loss has taken place, and may withdraw from our usual social contacts. This stage may last a few moments, or longer.” 2. *Anger* – “The grieving person may then be furious at the person who inflicted the hurt (even if he's dead), or at the world, for letting it happen. He may be angry with himself for letting the event take place, even if, realistically, nothing could have stopped it.”²²

²¹ 3, CCC # 2272.

²² 4, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, “Five Stages of Grief.”

Further, 3. **Bargaining** – “Now the grieving person may make bargains with GOD, asking, ‘If I do this, will You take away the loss?’”
4. **Depression** – “The person feels numb, although anger and sadness may remain underneath.” 5. **Acceptance** – “This is when the anger, sadness and mourning have tapered off. The person simply accepts the reality of the loss.”²³

XII. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

I perceive a relative present quietness in the couple, but how much is based in having peace in GOD versus being overwhelmed and psychological numbness I am not sure; they have been overwhelmed by the patient’s ongoing multiple illnesses and interruption of chemotherapy; his likely eventual death from the cancer; unresolved complex and suppressed grief over the loss of their 2 children; anticipatory grief of the patient at leaving his beloved wife behind when he dies and the wife at losing her beloved; their worry for each other’s health and well-being now and in the future.

The patient presents with a learned and reserved manner as a former military man; a strong quiet personality as a husband and father; submissive relationship in matters of faith to his wife’s leading; other fears and issues I am not aware of. The wife presents as deeply devoted and supportive to her husband. Their demeanors are a complex intersection of all these things that, in the end, only The LORD can sort out and heal for them.

The patient and his wife found it important to share that their new Church tradition is “accepting” of all people, including “gays” and those who are “pro-choice.” I don’t have enough information to understand more deeply their grief, beyond their superficial sharing that they lost a son due to AIDS, likely due to living a homosexual lifestyle, but maybe “a blood transfusion,” and a daughter due to abortion. It is significant that they were able to name their child lost to abortion, which acknowledges their baby’s humanity within the womb.

²³ 4, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, “Five Stages of Grief.”

The couple shared their disapproval of their former Traditional Catholic and Lutheran Churches, which condemn homosexuality and abortion as mortal sins. They shared their disapproval of Church denominations with set “hierarchy” structures. The wife emphasized importance to them of priesthood of all Christian believers without ecclesiastical authority. Better that they attend a Church where they find whatever level of peace they have, than to have them with no Church support. They seek affirmation in their conviction that their deceased children are in Heaven and praying for them now.

XIII. ANALYSIS OF YOURSELF AS THE CHAPLAIN

1. I was deeply moved by their suffering and by being able to pray with these dear people. I not only prayed for them, but they also prayed for me as they prayed for each other. I was moved by their deep love for each other as husband and wife, and the sadness of how death separates such couples. I recall how devastated my stepmother was when my father died. They were very much in love like this couple. I felt drawn to this couple also because they reminded me of my own parents in this way.

2. I was thankful to GOD that I was able to give them an opportunity to share. The wife needed to share at length about Faith issues, which I think she did for both of them. And I rejoiced that they both have a Christian Faith that I trust, by GOD’s Grace, is both a sustaining and a saving Faith in CHRIST for them – in spite of what I saw as critical spiritual shortcomings of their current Church community. When my brother-in-law was struggling with cancer, he found great peace and strength for himself and his wife in CHRIST. This I also observed in this patient’s wife and, by extension, in the patient. I concluded that Divine Mercy was at work in their hearts and gave thanks.

3. I was concerned about their deceased son who died of AIDS. This they did not share about with me beyond a superficial level. Nor of their daughter who died of abortion decades ago, but again I note it was significant that they recognized the humanity of that child lost to abortion by giving her a name.

Wondering if their need to be in a Church denomination with liberal views on homosexuality and abortion - and their rejection of Traditional Catholic and Lutheran Church teachings on these subjects – is a form of denial, anger and bargaining in their grieving process, leaving them stuck in perpetual depression. Loss of children by parents can never come to a full acceptance, but people can learn to function and find degrees of new living if they have an effective grief process.²⁴

4. The Church teaches that GOD's Mercy in CHRIST is very great and always ready to forgive us and cleanse us of our sins. I accept what The Church teaches. I am not a universalist. But who knows what happens between a person before GOD as we take our last breath, and in the twinkling of an eye, in confession, repentance and forgiveness of sins? I trust in GOD's perfect Judgments and also in His Loving Mercy. A reminder that I too am a sinner always in need of GOD's Grace.

5. I related deeply to this couple and their suffering. As I have encountered suffering and death in my own life and family, I see that I have grown in passion and closeness to GOD and the assurances of Faith found in The Church. When faced with my own mortality and sinfulness, I have become more hungry for GOD's Grace and comfort in CHRIST. Our Lord suffered for us. The Catholic Church teaches that, when we are in CHRIST, and we offer up our suffering to Him, we are drawn closer to The Lord and united with Him in a deep mystical way. And He, knowing our suffering, takes our burdens and wipes away our tears, now in part, fully in Heaven.

²⁴ 4, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, "Stages of Grief." Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance."

XIV. FUTURE PASTORAL OPPORTUNITIES

These Words recorded by Saint Paul encompass future pastoral care opportunities in such delicate and painful cases – to be a living sacrifice in CHRIST’s Love for others in need:

ROMANS 12:9-16

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving The Lord.

¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

¹³ Share with The Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.²⁵

²⁵ NIV, ROMANS 12:9-16.

XV. REFERENCES

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