

**Chaplain:** Robert Baral

**Patient:** deceased baby girl XY, 8 weeks old;  
father& mother, grandfather & grandmother, family friend

**Time of Visit:** 00:30

**Length of Visit:** 30 minutes

**Type of Visit:** Decedent Care

**Location of Ministry:** Children's Unit

**Title:** "Our Baby Has Died. She is 'Safe in The Arms of Love.'" <sup>1</sup>

**Diagnosis & Prognosis:**

On my previous recent visit, Dad had shared that their baby has "Trisomy 21" – that is, Down's Syndrome. The parents had expected their baby to die "within hours to days." Today I am called to revisit to support the grieving father and mother because their baby has just died.

**Peer group focus:**

Parents should never have to live to see the death of their children. It's not fair.

**Introduction:**

XY is an est. 8 week old baby girl, born at 38 weeks gestation, with a birth weight of just 3.5 pounds, with a small head and trouble breathing. On my previous recent visit, Dad and Mom had informed me that their baby girl, "X," was expected to die "in hours to days from Trisomy 21." They explained their baby was born with "a low birth weight, a small head and that babies with this usually die from breathing problems."

The parents present themselves to me as observant Catholic. On my first visit, I was called to arrange for The Sacrament of Anointing of The Sick for Carmen, on request of the parents. <sup>2</sup> The hospital Priest had previously recently administered The Sacrament of Baptism to baby X. I am now called several days after my first visit by the Nurse to support the family because the baby has just died.

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<sup>1</sup> 1, McBride, song – "Safe in the Arms of Love."

<sup>2</sup> The Sacrament of Anointing of The Sick is not given to babies.

As I enter the room, on my left is Grandmom, who is standing and holds the deceased Baby X lovingly in her arms, leaning against a cabinet. Only the baby's small face and part of her head is showing. Grandmom is quietly tearful. Next to her is Granddad, standing and leaning on the cabinet. He is silent. Next to him standing is a friend of the family. To my right is the crib. On my side of the crib is a Nurse, standing quietly. On the other side of the crib, by the window, Dad and Mom are sitting with another. Mom sobs quietly. Another Nurse sits between them.

### **Partial Text and Players**

C – Chaplain; D – Dad; M – Mom; N – Nurses

C1 – [I knock gently and enter. I stand to the side of Nurse2. Nurse1 makes quick eye contact with me as she talks to the parents. We nod slightly to each other.]

N1 – [Looking back and forth between parents] Your baby is not suffering any more. She's in Heaven.

D1 – [Dad repeats the Nurse's words.] She's not suffering any more. She's in Heaven.

N2 – I see the Chaplain is here. I am going to leave you with him. [She stands and shakes Dad's hand, gives Mom a hug and moves towards the door. Addressing me, she says quietly...] Thank you for coming so quickly! [Turning to the family...] This is the Chaplain. [She motions me forward. Both Nurses exit.]

D2 – Hi Chaplain Bob. She's died. [Dad steps forward towards me. Mom steps forward towards me behind him.]

C2 – Hello again Mr. Y, Mrs. Y. Hello, Grandma, Grandpa, folks. I am Chaplain Bob. I am so sorry for your family's loss. [I step forward towards Dad. I offer my hand. Firm grasp between us. I make silent eye contact with him for a time.]

D3 – Thank you, Bob. [His eyes are tearful.]

C3 – [Wife steps forward and I offer my hand. She cries quietly.] I'm so sorry, Mrs. Y. [I make eye contact with her. I hold her hand for a time. I go around the room to the grandfather, grandmother and then friend, repeating the process. I end up standing in the midst of the family, Dad and Mom to my right, grandparents and friend to my left. Grandma sways quietly cradling baby X.]

D4 – X is in Heaven right now. She's not feeling any more pain.

C4 – Mr. Y, I earnestly join you in knowing that your baby is safe in Heaven.

D5 – Right now, she has a new body. She's not feeling any more pain. And she's not crying. She's with JESUS right now!

C5 – X is safe in the arms of The Lord. That is very important for you to know and treasure. [Martina McBride's country song, "Safe in the Arms of Love" plays in my head.] I become tearful with them all.]

D6 – Bob, do you know that Bible verse? Can you read it for us?

C6 – Sure. That's in REVELATION. [I'm back. I pull out my Gideon-issued, hospital-approved King James Version New Testament and PSALMS. I open it up to The Text.] That's REVELATION 21:4. I know That One well. "And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."<sup>3</sup> [Dad asks me to read more. So I read This Scripture for them:

### **REVELATION 21:1-6**

<sup>1</sup> And I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

<sup>2</sup> And I John saw The Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down from GOD out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

<sup>3</sup> And I heard A Great Voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, The Tabernacle of GOD is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and GOD Himself shall be with them, and be their GOD.

<sup>4</sup> And GOD shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

<sup>5</sup> And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for These Words are true and faithful.

<sup>6</sup> And He said unto me, It is done. I AM Alpha and Omega, The Beginning and The End. I will give unto him that is athirst of The Fountain of The Water of Life freely!"<sup>4</sup>

M1 – She suffered a lot.

D7 – [Husband interrupts his wife. I remember their relationship. She shared a little on my first visit. See seems to quietly submit to him, secure in knowing that he loves her totally. He seems to speak for both of them.] We met with Father Z from Saint Joseph's. He's going to do X's funeral.

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<sup>3</sup> 2, KJV, REVELATION 21:4.

<sup>4</sup> 2, KJV, REVELATION 21:1-6.

C7 – [I try to broaden the acknowledgement of feelings to include Mom and all the family.] Mr. & Mrs. Y, and all of you, went through a lot. And I can't imagine how hard that was to see your baby X suffer. I'm so thankful that meeting with Father Z was a great help to you.

D8 – He counseled us. We didn't want to put X through more needless suffering with all kinds of life support.

C8 – So you were able to get some guidance from Father Z on this.

D9 – Yes. We already knew she was going to die. They couldn't save her. We didn't want to make her suffer more with needless life support. She's with JESUS now. She's not in any more pain. She has a new body! She's singing with the angels right now!" [Dad is the only one talking now. He lets go a stream of words. I'm curious about what "life support" decisions they wrestled with. But I let him control the conversation. He'll tell me what they need for now.]

D10 – [Dad puts his hand over their baby as Grandmom continues to tenderly hold baby X's body. Mom steps forward by his side.] Bob, could you say some prayers?

C9 – I would be happy to. [Granddad asks me to read PSALM 23, which I read as part of a prayer. I offer up prayers based on what has been shared with me. It went something like this, affirming what the family has verbalized.] O GOD, we commend the soul of baby X, Your precious child, to Your loving care, knowing by Your Grace, that she is safe in the arms of JESUS in Heaven, where there is no more suffering, nor pain, nor death, but only new life in You. We pray for comfort now for Your people... [I name Mom, Dad, Grandmom, Granddad and their friend by their first names. We end together with The Our Father.]

C10 – [I open my eyes. There are tears in everyone's eyes, including mine. I do not hide it. I stand there with the family. I note the Grandparents and Friend almost entirely silent. Mom has said only a little. I wonder to GOD silently that Dad seems to be giving voice for all of his family. I've provided the Religious care they wanted. I wonder if they are in a place to receive Spiritual care from me now in some gentle way that might invite sharing more about their feelings.]

D11 – [Dad puts his finger to the baby's face.] She's so beautiful and peaceful now.

C11 – [Pause. I address the parents by name] I remember when I was with you a week or so ago. That as you held your baby X together, that you [Dad] sang a beautiful hymn of peace for your baby. [I remain silent to see what this might bring.]

D12 – [Dad and Mom look at each other. He’s a big man and she’s petite. I remember my first visit with them. She looks up at him with a look of love, admiration and a slight smile through her tears. Dad looks at Mom, then his parents and friend. He again places his hand over Carmen’s little body as his own Mom continues to hold her. It occurs to me, that once his Mom held him in the same gentle way when he was a baby. He sings the same contemporary hymn. As he does, I hear that country song again in my head, “Safe in the Arms of Love.” Too bad I didn’t mention it at some point. He tells me the name of the song and the artist, which I don’t recall.] She’s one of our favorite Christian artists.

C12 – [I am conscious that only Dad is talking now. He is focused on Religious talk. That this is what he needs to do now. Dad and Mom shared a lot of feelings with me on my previous visit. They’ve been in anticipatory grief since at least a week. Tonight, in the initial aftermath of their baby’s death, it’s their grief to be taken at their speed. Everyone is tearful. I take out a tissue and wipe my eyes.] That is such a lovely song, a testimony of your family’s love and Faith together.

D13 – Thank you so much for coming back, Chaplain Bob.

C13 – As long as I live on earth, and for ever in Heaven, I will remember the love of your family for GOD, each other and your baby X. And that beautiful song. [I am with them for a little longer, mostly just listening. Dad and Mom have 3 healthy kids at home. They want their own Priest called to be with them now if possible. They ask me for help contacting him and also a Protestant Pastor friend. I remind them to have the Nurse call me if they need me again. They thank me for being with them. I go to each in turn and, holding their hand for a time, offering a short condolence.]

C14 – [I call Father A and he is in quickly. I knew he would be. I find the phone number for their Protestant Pastor friend and make the call. I relay the family’s cell phone number, which they had asked me to do.]

### **Theological Reflection:**

Original Sin is transmitted to all people from our First Parents, Adam and Eve. It is the loss of Original Holiness and Justice. It is not an act, but a state. The Catechism of The Catholic Church states that this “deprivation of Original Holiness and Justice” brings us into this world “subject to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death,” which causes us to be “inclined to sin” further and separates us from GOD.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 3, CCC, # 404, p 114.

The child who dies having received Baptism enters Heaven. “By Baptism all sins are forgiven, Original Sin and all Personal Sins, as well as all punishment for sin. In those who have been reborn, nothing remains that would impede their entry into The Kingdom of GOD...”<sup>6</sup> “Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark... of his belonging to CHRIST...”<sup>7</sup> Therefore infant Baptism brings “The Grace of salvation” by “removing the taint of Original Sin.”<sup>8</sup>

The Church recognizes that babies are innocent of Personal or Actual Sin. GOD’s Justice requires a Means for children who die without receiving The Sacrament of Baptism to still be saved in some way. So The Catholic Church entrusts the souls of such children “to The Mercy of GOD...,” knowing that GOD “...desires that all men should be saved, and [recalls] JESUS’ tenderness toward children...”<sup>9</sup> Therefore we “...hope that there is a Way of Salvation for children who have died without Baptism... All the more urgent is The Church’s call not to prevent little children coming to CHRIST through The Gift of Holy Baptism.”<sup>10</sup>

Baptism removes the stain of Original Sin “by imparting the life of CHRIST’s Grace... [and] turns a man back toward GOD.” It does not make us perfect, as our nature remains “weakened and inclined to evil.” But it does restore us to GOD, offers us the life pilgrimage of Faith in CHRIST, opens the door to ongoing Grace and calls us to His Eternal Kingdom.<sup>11</sup>

For the Baptized who have reached the age of consent, “To die in Mortal Sin, without repenting and accepting GOD’s merciful Love, means remaining separated from Him for ever by our own free choice...”<sup>12</sup> The Sacrament of Reconciliation – Confession, Penance & Absolution - brings forgiveness of Mortal Sin<sup>13</sup> and Venial Sin<sup>14</sup> to the Baptized.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 3, CCC # 1263, p 353.

<sup>7</sup> 3, CCC # 1272, p 356.

<sup>8</sup> 3, CCC # 1250, p 350.

<sup>9</sup> 4, NAB, MARK 10:14, “When JESUS saw this he became indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to Me; do not prevent them, for The Kingdom of GOD belongs to such as these.”

<sup>10</sup> 3, CCC # 1261, p 353. Once commonly called “Limbus Infantum.”

<sup>11</sup> 3, CCC, # 405, p 114.

<sup>12</sup> 3, CCC # 1033, p 292.

<sup>13</sup> 3, CCC # 1861, p 508. Mortal Sin is a complete loss of Saving Grace and communion with GOD.

The Sacrament of The Eucharist, which in proper reception relieves us of Venial Sin, is a channel of GOD's Grace that strengthens our Faith and keeps us from further Sin, Mortal and Venial.<sup>16</sup> The Sacrament of Anointing of The Sick, which if death approaches, prepares us for the final journey Home to GOD by removing unconfessed Mortal and Venial Sins.<sup>17</sup>

Further, in ways known only to GOD, there is hope of salvation even for those who, through no fault of their own, never knew The Gospel or received Baptism. This applies to the preborn, infants, children and adults. The Catechism of The Catholic Church makes this clear: "Every man who is ignorant of The Gospel of CHRIST and of His Church, but seeks The Truth and does the will of GOD in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity."<sup>18</sup>

### **Lessons in Ministry:**

Trisomy 21 is the most common form of "Down's Syndrome," characterized by varied levels of mental retardation and other defects, such as smaller and abnormally shaped head and face. Why this happens is not understood. The incidence of Down's Syndrome generally increases with the age of the mother. Up to 50% of such cases require heart surgery, which if done, increases the survival rate markedly. With today's corrective procedures, life support and daily care, many Down's Syndrome patients live into adulthood.<sup>19</sup> But that was not the case with baby Carmen today.

After consulting with their Priest, the parents decided not to have their baby receive "life support," which may well have extended the baby's earthly life, but would have also caused suffering for both the baby and the family, and would not have altered the end result of certain impending death. I did not make any judgment on the family's care decisions. I accepted where they were and joined them there.

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<sup>14</sup> 3, CCC # 1862, p 508. Venial Sin is a partial loss of communion with GOD, but salvation remains.

<sup>15</sup> 3, CCC # 1422-1424, p 396-397.

<sup>16</sup> 3, CCC # 1393-1395, p 390-391.

<sup>17</sup> 3, CCC # 1532, P 425.

<sup>18</sup> 3, CCC # 1260, p 353.

<sup>19</sup> 5, RHMC Multimedia Encyclopedia, "Trisomy 21 – Down's Syndrome."

In the initial stages of supporting people in the midst of emergency crisis and bereavement, I find the order of Spiritual care to Religious care is often reversed. What grieving families often – but not always - need and want initially when loved are at the edge or beyond death is the reassuring structure of Religious care.

It is not the time to prod people into talking and sharing their Story. If it comes, I let it happen. If it doesn't, this is not the time to be a spiritual can opener. The parents and I in this case connected more closely because I was able to meet them on a previous visit, where my focus was first on Spiritual care by GOD's Grace.

**Self Awareness:**

I was aware of how subdued this family was in expressing their emotions today:

1.) The family had been in anticipatory grief for some time. The baby's passing was sad loss, but also a release and relief from this painful, slow motion death.

2.) I was conscious of my experience, that many white middle class Americans tend to be more restrained in showing grief emotions that some other ethnic groups.

3) I was aware of how vital this family's strong Christian Faith was to their processing and coping with this loss. And also for me. I joined the family in The Certainty of our common Hope that this baby was now truly singing in Heaven, safe in the arms of JESUS CHRIST. As I write this, Martina McBride's country song keeps going through my head,



“Safe in The Arms of Love:”<sup>20</sup>

“My heart's not ready for the rocking chair.  
I need somebody who really cares.  
So tired of livin' solitaire.  
Someday I'm gonna be  
Safe in the arms of love.”

“Strip your heart and it starts to show.  
Love is a high-wire act, I know.  
Someday I'll find a net below.  
Someday I'm gonna be  
Safe in the arms of love  
Safe in the arms of love.”

(CHORUS)

“I want arms that know how to rock me  
Safe in the arms of love.  
I wanna fall and know that love has caught me.  
Safe in the arms of love.  
Safe in the arms of love!”

“I want a heart to be forever mine.  
Want eyes to see me satisfied.  
Gonna hang my heartaches out to dry.  
Some day I'm gonna be  
Safe in the arms of love.  
Safe in the arms of love.”

4) I have the same certain Hope with this family, I know that the baby that my now ex-wife and I lost many years ago is likewise truly singing in Heaven, “Safe in The Arms of Love.” Our baby is truly safe in the arms of The Perfect Eternal Love, The Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.

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<sup>20</sup> 1, Martina McBride, “Safe in the Arms of Love.”  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRCqTgx4GS4>

5) I have never talked with anyone until recently about the loss of our child via abortion so many years ago. Only within the last year did I confess this sin to my Priest in The Sacrament of Reconciliation. And only this last week have I made myself so vulnerable in sharing my feelings about this loss. For the first time in my life, I am doing the work of grieving for this loss. And when I meet the next baby X and family, I will be better able to hear their song over and through my own.

## **References**

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