

I dread that phone call

Before Covid, I used to celebrate First Friday Mass at one of the nursing homes. I always looked forward to the experience, I would arrive early and spend some time visiting with the patients.

In our conversations, I would chat with them about where was home, how long they had been in the nursing home as well as checking out how they were doing. I would always try and connect someone I knew with the patient's home village or town. I always treasured such visits and opportunities, realizing that many of the residents rarely had visitors or had no immediate family in the area.

Following Covid, I missed such opportunities of interacting with the residents. Now, five years later, I was invited to celebrate Mass again with the residents. As I accepted the invitation, I wondered would I see any of the faces from five years earlier. Had Covid won some finite battles? Had others, just because of age or suffering, been called home?

As I arrived for the Mass, I noticed about fifty residents gathered, a half-hour before Mass. In one corner, members of the town choir were tuning up and practicing the songs for the Mass. As I glanced around the room, I recognized just a few faces. Some were staff and just one or two residents.

I began to find out names and places and was asked, "Who are you?" and "Where are you from?" Sometimes, that was followed by "I'm from.... Do you know where that is?"

I noticed some folks who were day residents; who were there for therapy or to avail of social services. One lady in particular – a day resident – caught my curiosity. As we chatted, I found out that she lived about eight miles from me and that we both knew some of the same persons. She seemed anxious to talk some more but it was time for Mass to begin.

Following Mass, she approached me and asked, "Can I talk to you?" As we talked, I began to realize why she was so anxious to talk. "It's my daughter, Father!" I listened. "Would you say a Mass for her and keep her in your prayers?" I assured her. One might begin to assume that her daughter might be having some health issues; maybe a cancer diagnosis and the prognosis didn't seem promising, or assume that her daughter might be in an abusive relationship and the mother feared for her daughter's life?

As I listened some more, I got a glimpse of what might be troubling this mother. "My daughter!" she emphasized, "she is a nurse. She has a very good position, when I call her when she is not working, she won't answer my phone calls." I thought to myself, maybe she is resting after working nights or in the middle of something that she cannot answer.

The mother, continued, "I dread her phone calls when she does call me back finally." "Why?" I asked "She is very nasty to me, on the phone" she continued. "Why would she be so nasty?" I asked. "I have no idea. I tried to bring her up right like the rest of my kids. I really don't know why she is so angry with me."

When our conversation ended, I assured this mother that I would say Mass for her and her relationship with her daughter as well as keep both of them in my prayers.

As I drove home from that nursing home Mass, I had my own unanswered questions about that mother and her daughter. I realized that there is not only a physical bond between that mother and daughter but there is even a stronger and more emotional bond between them. My own questions began to unravel. What really happened to sever that relationship between mother and daughter? Was the mother too domineering and controlling? Is there a jealousy and resentment there between mother and daughter? If so, what are its root causes? Did the mother show a preference for her other children and this daughter felt ostracized? Did this daughter feel unloved by her mother? Did the daughter have some kind of deep-seated resentment toward her mother? Did sexuality have anything to do with the erosion of the relationship? What are some of the inner demons that the daughter might be fighting?

So many beautiful thoughts and reflections have been written about the special physical and emotional bond that should exist, ideally, between a mother and daughter. Here, this mother and daughter both hurt because of the lack of such intimate bond,

I thought of Mother's Day approaching and wondering would it be a bittersweet occasion that generated festering wounds rather than celebratory mother-daughter's unique bonding.

I do hope that I will be invited back again to celebrate Mass for the residents of that nursing home. Of course, there is always the hope that some of our prayers may be answered.