

Ashes of hope

I walked down the aisle after our final Sunday morning Mass. I was ready for lunch and a few hours of rest in my favorite recliner.

As I passed, she exited the pew and asked, "Can I talk with you for a few minutes?" I asked her to wait until I had taken off my vestments.

We sat down in the first pew and she began. "I was called out early this morning at 5:30 a.m. to a fire. I had psyched myself up for the job but, now I know that I was not ready to handle what happened. The fire destroyed the home and a woman died in the fire. I cannot get it out of my mind. This is Mother's Day and she was a mother. I talked to my fellow fire personnel and told them that I was having a hard time with it and they suggested that I talk with my priest. So, here I am asking you for help."

I listened to her story. Obviously, being a mother herself especially on this Mother's Day, she felt a deep sense of sadness for the women who died in the fire and that the fire personnel did not get there in time to save her life.

Obviously, no words of mine would take away her pain. Maybe some of my words might give her some consolation and help her to see some sense in the trauma she was experiencing.

I reminded her that all the struggles and emotions she was feeling were real and legitimate. They were indicators that she cared deeply. She should not apologize for her struggles or feelings to anyone. She needed to be honest with herself and not be afraid to own them.

I then suggested to her that once she embraced her feelings and struggles, she needed to hold them until they were ready to speak to her and to teach her.

I asked her, that in order to learn from her experience, she needed to give it both time and space. So often we frustrate the healing and learning process for people by suggesting to them that "it is time to move on," or "you should be over this by now."

Everyone deals with things differently, depending on their make-up and resources. One size or time-limit does not fit all. No one can force someone else to move on without them being ready.

Many times, we have preconceived idea of how things should turn out and we look for them to turn out that particular way. When they don't turn out the way we anticipate, we get more frustrated and mixed up. Tunnel vision can become the stumbling block to a growth potential experience.

Openness to the big picture as conceived by the Great Creative Artist is imperative, especially when that openness calls for time and faith. Often the Lord stretches us but we don't want to cooperate because, like an elastic band, we might break.

Seeing that it was Mother's Day, I suggested that she take a moment to count her own blessings. She needed to take the time to be grateful for the gifts of her husband and children. She needed to say the things she needed to say to them; do the things with them; celebrate the things with them she needed to because today is the only gift and opportunity she has to do it.

Faith will take her through her own cross of questions, pain and loss to redemptive hope and reassurance.

Recently, as I finished one of my classes for "New Wine" in Ocean Springs, Sid, a participant, handed me three pages of some of his poetry and asked if I would look over them. His poem on "Faith" spoke in a special way to me. He wrote: "I have faith because I am. I have faith because light will turn to darkness and darkness will turn to light. I have faith because of the seas. I have faith because of the trees. I have faith when I hear a newborn cry. I have faith when I see an old one die. I have faith when I look at the stars in the sky. I have faith because something cannot come from nothing. I have faith because nothing did become something. I have faith because of who made nothing something."