

A Towel to cry on

I walked in the front door of the offices and saw two people – a man and a woman – sitting in the reception area. The gentleman said, “We’re waiting to see you.” Doing some mental reflection, I realized that I did not have any appointments scheduled at that time.

The gentleman indicated that he would go first as he had a simple request and suggestion to make. He followed me into the office and made his pitch. I made a mental note of his suggestion and indicated that we might consider it at a later date. He seemed satisfied and left.

Shortly after he left, I ushered the woman into my office. I had never seen her before and she did not volunteer her name. I respected her wishes. He was probably in her late fifties, medium build and wore glasses.

She began with “I don’t know where to start.” I encouraged her to start anywhere and that, eventually, we would get to the heart of what was bothering her.

“I just lost my job,” she volunteered. Visibly shaken and obviously distraught, he began to tell me that she had worked for several years at a medical clinic where a group of three doctors practiced. She did everything except be the receptionist. She scheduled appointments, scheduled surgeries, took care of billing, filed insurance claims and helped to build up the medical practice.

How did she lose her job? She failed to include certain billing items given her by a doctor in the practice. The doctor indicated that “heads would roll” and at 3 p.m. that afternoon, she was escorted from the office.

As she talked, she began to share some of the other crosses in her life. Her mother died when she was nine years old and she had to raise her two brothers and a sister. Later on, she married and has three children. One of her son’s died some years ago. Her husband died several years ago. Some years ago, she had open heart surgery and was now facing the possibility of having stints inserted or worse still, another open heart surgery

Through it all, she wondered where God was. “I asked God, “When is enough enough? Why all these crosses? Why do all the people I love die? I just can’t take it any more. I tried to do my job as good as I could. I always cared about the people who came to our office. I even made a promise to a man I had scheduled for surgery that I would be there for him through it all. And now I cannot. I failed him. But I did call his wife and tell her that I couldn’t be there for her husband’s surgery and I explained why. She seemed to understand.”

Frequently, as she talked, she would raise her glasses to reveal free flowing tears. Then she would reach into her pocket book and take out a small blue towel to wipe them.

As I continued to listen to this woman, I wondered where she got the strength to carry so many crosses. She wondered herself but she also wondered if she had the strength, stamina and faith to continue. She wondered why God was sending her so many crosses.

I admired this woman and her courage and depth of faith as she battled through uncharted waters. She was blessed to have found another soul mate to share her life and journey. “He has blessed me and supports me through all this pain.”

I have one friend who stands by me through all this and that is one of my four dogs. She senses that there is something troubling me and she comes and puts her head in my lap and stays close to me all the time.”

Later that evening, as I prayed Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the House, the first psalm was Psalm 137 – how the people sat and wept by the streams of Babylon while in exile from their country, temple and God.

This woman lived and wept in her own Babylon. Yet, she still looked for strength and hope to carry her beyond her exile. She may have used the towel to dry her tears but was not willing to throw in that same towel yet.