

Finding God in Times of Grief

I write these reflection not because I am some kind of an expert on grief counseling, nor even as someone who can claim to have experienced the intensity of the losses that you have experienced. My own Mom passed away some thirty-three years ago. That seems like ancient history. And while my own Dad's passing was just ten years ago, the experiences of loss seem so far away. It would be arrogant on my part, therefore, to make the claim that I know exactly what you are going through. Grief is a very individualized process, and maybe there is no one who will ever quite understand fully what you have gone through or what you are going through in the present moment. Not as an expert do I write these reflections, but as someone who wants to allow the power of God to bring healing and wholeness to your life. I hope to explore with you in these pages some ways in which we can allow the Lord to bring us that wholeness that we so long for.

I begin these reflections with a passage of scripture that may be familiar to you -- the story of the raising of Lazarus:

When Mary came to the place where Jesus was, seeing him she fell at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would never have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jewish folk who had accompanied her also weeping, he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions.

"Where have you laid him?" Jesus asked.

"Lord, come and see," they said.

Jesus began to weep which caused the Jews to remark, "See how much He loved him!" But some said, "He opened the eyes of that blind man. Why could he have not done something to stop this man from dying?"

Once again, troubled in spirit, Jesus approached the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it. "Take away the stone," Jesus directed.

Martha, the dead man's sister, said to him, "Lord, it has been four days now. Surely there will be a stench!"

Jesus replied, "Did I not assure you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

They then took away the stone, and Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd that they may believe that you sent me."

Having said this, Jesus called loudly, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth.

"Untie him," Jesus told them, "and let him go free."

This caused many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, to put their faith in him.

John 11:32 - 44

When someone you love dies, actually three people die, when you think of it -- your beloved, you yourself and God. The fact that we ourselves die, or perhaps a substantial part of us dies with a loved one is painfully obvious. In those first stages of grief, we go through life like a zombie, taking care of tasks and duties and responsibilities none the less, but with no life and no

energy. Sometimes we even find ourselves engaging in some self-destructive activities in those early stages of grief -- we drive the car a little faster, we busy ourselves to exhaustion, or we even try to anesthetize the pain one way or another.

Everyone tells you that time heals all wounds. I have not found that to be true -- as if you could only turn enough calendar pages to make the wounds go away. We put that unrealistic expectation on ourselves: "if I can just get through the holiday, or my loved one's birthday, or whatever the upcoming event is that we are so dreading, if I can just turn the calendar pages, the pain will be less." Or we make unrealistic expectations upon ourselves become surprised that "after all this time" we are still feeling the loss. It is my firm belief that time doesn't heal all wounds. . . only God heals wounds.

But how can God heal wounds if God is dead? As I said in the beginning of this reflection, there are three people who die when a loved one passes on: your beloved, you yourself, and God. What do I mean when I say that God is dead? Well, what has died in the process of our loved one's dying is our image of God -- an image of God that was there, unchallenged, since the days when we first learned about him from our parents and teachers. But, here is the good news -- that image of God *had* to die.

Do you remember the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus? The two people, Cleopas and perhaps his wife, were walking from the city of Jerusalem to their hometown of Emmaus shortly after Easter Sunday. They were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, a powerful time for Jewish people. At each Passover, the Jews believed that this might be the time when the Messiah would reveal himself -- that God would finally vanquish all of Israel's enemies and that Israel would be set free from all its foreign oppressors and overlords. Jesus, a man powerful in word and deed, seemed to be a likely candidate for the job. And when he appears in Jerusalem for the Passover, he is hailed as Messiah on Palm Sunday. Independence from Rome -- freedom from taxes -- Hosanna! But of course, it didn't work out that way -- and we can even hear the pain of disappointment from Cleopas as he says to the stranger who walks with him, "We were hoping that he was going to be the one to redeem Israel." Then Jesus begins to open their eyes to a deeper reality, a deeper presence. But first, he says to Cleopas, "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things?" In other words, God, or at least our image of God, had to die.

So what was your image of God that died on the day that your loved one died? Let's look at some of the images of God that we grew up with. The fact is that our understanding of the world, of human nature, of relationships -- all this changes as we get older. But, for the most part, our understanding of God remains pretty much the same all through life until something traumatic happens. I don't think it would be too blasphemous to say that most of us thought about God in the same way as we thought about Santa Claus. For most of us, Santa Claus is a mirror image of God. Think of the popular song, *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*:

You better watch out, you better not cry.

Be better not pout I'm telling you why,

Santa Claus is coming to town.

He's making a list, checking it twice,

Gonna find out who's naughty or nice,
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when your awake.

He knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake.

Just as an aside: When you think of it, Santa is a pretty good invention if you want your kids to behave. You always have something to hang over their heads around the holiday times if you want to motivate them. Who wants a stocking of coal? God has been often times used in the same way by Church leaders to maintain control over the flock -- do this or your going to hell!

Anyway, the whole point of the song *Santa Claus Coming to Town* says this: If you're a good boy or girl, Santa is going to give you good things. Of course, you have to tell him what you want. So, you make your Santa-list, and then you wait on the department store line for your chance to tell Santa everything that was on your list. If you didn't get what you wanted, if you didn't get what was on the list, then you were told, "Santa knew better; he knew that you shouldn't have that." Of course, there was always the fear that Santa saw all the bad stuff that you did and Santa wasn't going to give you what you wanted. He sees you when your sleeping, he knows when you're awake. The eyes of Santa, perhaps like the eyes of God, are searching eyes, seeing into all the dark and secretive recesses of our lives. He, God or Santa, are just waiting to trip you up. And remember, neither Santa nor God count percentages or averages: you can be good right up until Christmas Eve -- you can have worked tirelessly to keep your slate nice and clean. But, one false step even before the stroke of midnight -- and you blew it! I hope that you can begin to see the connections between our image of God and our image of Santa Claus.

The whole mythology around Santa Claus really is a projection of a very sad image of God that we possess and that we really don't challenge -- until we are forced to challenge it when that image of God has died. The saddest part of the song *Santa Claus Is Coming to Town* is that you are not allowed to have your own emotions. "You better not cry, you better not pout." That's pretty violent to a kid, when you think about it. Think back to the days when you were a kid and you fell and hurt yourself when you were playing. Where I grew up, there were no play grounds -- we played on the street. If I fell in the street and skinned my knee, I wouldn't cry or wail right away. I guess that wasn't too cool to do when you were with all your friends. Instead, I would go running inside the house and desperately search for those people who loved me. Then, as soon as I saw Mom, I knew it was O.K. to unleash all the pain. It was as if she gave me permission to feel the pain and to express the pain. The pain was there all along -- but the pain is held inward until someone comes along and gives me the permission to cry. And isn't that beautiful? Of course, it didn't always work that way. There were moments when you weren't given permission to cry. "Oh come on, what are you crying about. Don't be such a baby. You're not really hurt." Sometimes a crying child can be treated like a barking dog. *I'll really give you something to cry about!* All we're looking for is someone who will give us permission to unleash the pain!

All too often, during the time of grieving, we desperately look for someone who will give us the permission to unleash the pain. Sadly, after about a month or two, it's so hard to find those people. This is where you get the list of the ten stupidest things that people say to people who are

in grief:

The one who has lost a loved one through a long-term illness often hears: *At least they're not suffering any more*

The one who has lost a loved one through a sudden accident often hears: *At least they didn't suffer.*

The one who has lost a spouse after many years of marriage we say, *At least you have some good memories*

The one who has lost a baby or a child often hears, *You don't know: maybe if they didn't die something worse would have happened later on* (I don't know too many things worse than death.)

The one who has lost a baby through a miscarriage is often told: *You can always have more children.*

To this list, add other great phrases like:

Your loved one wouldn't want you to cry.

Try to do something to take your mind off of things.

Think positive thoughts!

You've got to put it behind you and move on.

God knew what was best -- he has his reasons.

Ten dopey phrases -- you could probably add to the list. Each of the phrases are ways that people can tell us that they really don't want us to wail and cry -- they don't give us permission to express the pain. It's not some kind of malice that motivates people to say these things -- I suppose they want to fix the pain but they can't.

The last of these phrases, however, speaks about not questioning God -- God has his reasons and he knows what is best, so you better not tell him how you are feeling. You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout. Our image of God, like that of Santa Claus, is someone who doesn't want to hear us pouting and crying. He doesn't want to hear our rage and anger. God doesn't even want to hear our questions: God has his reasons, so you better not even ask him *Why?*

Ultimately, our image of the Santa Claus God dies. The ways in which we have related to God in the past dies. We're good people -- we've kept our nose clean, obeyed all the rules -- we did what we were supposed to do. But we didn't get what we want. And so, our understanding of God dies. But this is more than just the death of a child's concept of reality. This is more than just discovering that the moon is not made of green cheese. This is more than just feeling the disappointment that there is no Santa Claus. This is the death of someone upon whom we've placed all our trust and hope. We don't know what to believe any more, we don't know what to think any more -- we don't even know how to pray any more.

But, the good news is that this concept of God *has* to die if we are really going to discover who God really is. Israel only really discovered who God was when they were forty years in the desert. And, if you feel like you're in a desert right now, that's good news -- now God can reveal himself. And the better news is that not only does God come alive but you come alive and your

loved one comes alive. This is the reality I want to address in the rest of this reflection.

So, how does the new reborn God reveal himself to me? For the Christian, we believe that we find God in a unique and singular way in the person of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the best image of Jesus Christ that I know is the Sacred Heart. Now, I have to confess that until a few months ago, devotion to the Sacred Heart was not a part of my spirituality. The image itself seemed so pietistic -- almost an embarrassment in our relationship with non-catholics. I threw out the Sacred Heart in exchange for more sophisticated understandings of Jesus. But, the Sacred Heart tells me that God has a human heart. Right now, even in heaven, God desires and feels and is broken because he has taken on a human heart. And so, through the Sacred Heart, let me tell you what my new understanding of God is.

When I was a child, I studied the Baltimore catechism just like anyone else. But, I have to admit that I was a very strange kid who became overly concerned about discrepancies that I would find in the catechism. For example, there was the question in the old Baltimore Catechism: How many natures does Jesus Christ have? And the answer: Jesus Christ has two natures: the nature of God and the nature of man (forgive the sexist language). But, I found another edition of the catechism that said, "Jesus Christ *had* two natures, the nature of God and the nature of man. This troubled me. Which is it? Jesus has two natures? Jesus had two natures? So, I brought this question up in confession and the priest told me, "Jesus has two natures -- even today. After Jesus died, he didn't go back to being God. He still has a human nature."

But, what does that mean? For me it means that God has so taken on our human state that even right now in Christ he has a human heart: a heart that yearns, a heart that hopes, a heart that breaks. First of all, a heart that yearns. We speak of the human heart is the seat of desire; we say, "I have my heart set on that." Traditionally, it would be very hard to conceive of God as wanting anything -- after all, he lives in perfect beatitude in heaven. He doesn't want for anything. Yet, if God has a human heart, he does have desires. In the gospel of John, we hear one of these human desires, "Father, I pray not only for my disciples but for all who will come to believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you. That they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me."

In Jesus, we hear what God desires in his heart -- that we can all be one: that where Jesus is, we also may be. At first, this desire of Jesus, this desire of the Sacred Heart seems to say only that someday we may all find ourselves in heaven, with Jesus, with Mary, with the saints and our loved ones. But Jesus desires more -- he desires that the Kingdom of God be in our midst even today -- right now. The great desire of God is that we discover one another in the Sacred Heart of Jesus even now. Later, I'm going to suggest a way that we can pray in that Sacred Heart of Jesus and find our loved one.

The human heart is also a heart that can break. That means that right now, God's heart is breaking with you. Just as Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus as we heard in the reading with which I began this reflection, so too God in Jesus wept on the day that your loved one died; God

wept with you every time you shed a tear, cried a sob, felt your heart ripped in two. Do you remember in the gospel story when Jesus breathed his last on the cross? In Matthew's gospel we hear about the veil in the temple being torn in half. The veil was the Jewish version of the altar rail -- it separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple -- it kept God on one side and us on the other side. Now, that barrier is torn down. In Jesus, God has taken up all of human reality, even human suffering, pain and longing.

In short, the Sacred Heart of Jesus means that because God and Jesus are truly one, God has a human heart that longs for you, a human heart that breaks for you. And even more importantly, all those people who are right now in the heart of Jesus, all those people who have passed onto the other side, they too long for you and their heart breaks for you.

Think, for a moment then of what that means about heaven. When I was a child, my mother and I had this discussion about heaven. I can remember my mother saying to me, "When I get to heaven, I can't wait to be with my parents and my little brother Anthony who died at the age of two." In my own intellectual arrogance I disagreed with her because I heard about this thing called *the Beatific Vision*. "Oh mother," I said. "When you get to heaven, you are going to be so caught up in the vision of God you won't desire anything else. You're going to be perfectly happy just beholding the beatific vision. You'll be so happy you won't want to look for your parents or your brother or anyone for that matter." My mother looked at me with horror and said, "Anthony, what are you talking about, *the Beatific Vision*. Heaven isn't going to be heaven without the people you love."

I've thought about that in recent years. Mother was right. Heaven isn't perfectly heaven without the people you love. Sure, when we die we're going to be embraced by God. Sure, when we die we'll be freed from this life of pain, this vale of tears. But heaven isn't going to be heaven without the people you love. Now, on the one hand we can picture all these people up in heaven having a grand old time and not giving half a thought to us here on earth, we who are still in the vale of tears. But these people are caught up into the mystery of the Sacred Heart -- they live in the heart of Jesus, and that heart still yearns and desires for us to be with them fully. "Father, that they may all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you."

Concretely, I have come to believe that the people who have passed to the other side really do miss us, and they desire to be one with us. Well, obviously there will come a time when we will all be one in Christ, all sharing his company in the communion of saints. But even right now they want to be one with us. And the way they can be one with us is in prayer.

Well, what exactly is prayer? Before our loved one died, maybe we thought about prayer as a way of trying to tell God how to do his business. Like we have all these miseries here on earth, and God has to be reminded about all the things he should be taking care of. So we get on our prayer telephone to God, saying, "Oh God, help this person find some employment. They have three kids to care for and they are really desperate." And God says, "Hey, thanks for calling my attention to that. Yes, you're right -- I didn't realize that those people had all those mouths to feed. Maybe I better do something about that. Yes, thanks for telling me about that sick person --

you're right, they don't deserve that illness. Maybe I better do something to help them." Prayer is too often seen like we're rubbing the bottle of the genie to get our three wishes. Like the old Groucho Marx show, *You Bet Your Life* -- say the magic word and the duck comes out of the sky and you win \$1,000. Say the right prayer, make the right novena to St. Jude, copy this novena nine times and leave it in nine Churches on nine consecutive days and you'll get what you are praying for.

Well, if that's our concept of prayer, no wonder we might find it hard to pray in the midst of the grieving process -- fundamentally, what has come down to us is that prayer doesn't work -- at least that genie-in-the-bottle kind of prayer doesn't work. Our judgment that this kind of praying doesn't work may have developed in those situations where we were praying for the recovery of our loved one if they were suffering from a long and terminal illness. God, make them better -- get rid of the cancer. We hear about miracles all the time and we pray for that miraculous healing in a loved one and it doesn't happen. And we judge, "Maybe I didn't say the right prayers -- maybe I didn't pray hard enough, or with enough faith." Maybe I didn't say the right word, like on the Groucho Marx show. Obviously, my prayers didn't work.

But what is prayer? Prayer, ultimately, is loving communion -- it is communion with the heart of Christ and communion with all those who are in the heart of Christ. Prayer is the way we find ourselves in loving communion with one another. I think that is why the tradition of our Church has wisely set forth the Eucharist as a beautiful prayer both for the living and the dead. On All Souls' Day, we celebrate this long-standing tradition of our Church that, through the Eucharist, we are still in loving communion with those who have passed to the other side.

What I would like to do at this point in this reflection is to suggest some very concrete ways we might pray in the midst of the grieving process. First, let me offer some reasons why we ought to pray for those who have died. Fundamentally, why we pray for the dead is so that their lives and our lives can move on. Now, when you first hear that, it sounds like I'm saying that prayer is a way that we can separately move on with our lives. The image you might get is one of two people walking down a path together, and then they come to a fork in the road -- one goes one way, and the other goes another way, and you won't see each other again, or at least for a while, so you utter this prayer, "God be with you," or, as we say in colloquial English shorthand, "Good-bye." But the image strikes us with horror because we don't want to have to say good-bye to the people we love, and if that is what prayer is all about, then I don't want anything to do with it. I have found that people are even afraid to stop the grieving process because they feel that once they have stopped grieving, they will stop remembering their loved one. It's almost as if the grief were the only way they can relate to their deceased loved one, and to suggest that we stop grieving and move on with life is like saying, "Cut off all ties with your loved one."

However, you can't bury love -- love didn't go into the grave on the day that your loved one died. So, what do I mean when I say that prayer for the dead is necessary so that we can move on with our lives? Our moving on is a moving together. Together, we move more deeply into the heart of Christ so that together, both we the living as well as the deceased, can experience love, serenity and peace.

First let me speak about the moving on that our deceased loved ones are doing. Our tradition has spoken about Purgatory, a sort of half-way house between heaven and hell. Our tradition also spoke about our prayers helping the poor souls in purgatory moving from this place of unrest into the perfect rest of heaven. Well, what exactly is purgatory? Our tradition says that purgatory is the place where the deceased undergo a kind of temporal punishment due to sins already forgiven. Now, that might not have sat too well with you, particularly if you start thinking about your loved ones. I mean, if a sin is forgiven, why do we have to suffer any kind of punishment for it? The tradition said that, even though the sin is forgiven, sin still has consequences and creates a situation that needs to be "paid for." Fine, but what about that good thief on the cross? Remember the scene at Calvary when the good thief says to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus says, "This day, you will be with me in paradise." This day you will be with me. Jesus doesn't say, "After your 312 years in purgatory for stealing will you be with me."

I believe that those who die in the Lord are brought into the mystery of his love, into his Sacred Heart. However, perhaps they aren't able to experience that love fully just yet. Why not? I go back to the wise words of my mother, "Heaven isn't going to be heaven without the people you love." Heaven will not be fully heaven if there is an obstacle between us and our deceased loved one. You see, we're all members of the Body of Christ, and Jesus wants us to be all one in Him. But our human situation is such that we have differences between us, the petty little differences that arise between us even here on earth and may even be carried into the grave. In some way, those barriers, those obstacles have to be overcome. Of course, we might all feel, "Well it's too late to make up with the deceased -- after all, they left us and we can't say we're sorry and we can't forgive them for the hurts which they have caused." But that is exactly where prayer comes in.

There is a great deal of resistance, emotionally, to say that part of our prayer for our deceased loved one has to involve some form of mutual forgiving and asking for forgiveness. One of the dynamics that takes place after the death of a loved one is that we begin to make our relationship so incredibly larger than life. We want to forget the fact that we ever had arguments, that there were times when we found our loved ones to be troublesome or even obnoxious. We instantly want to canonize them. Sometimes at a wake you see the dynamic of all the people clambering to be considered to belong to the inner circle of the deceased. I want to believe that I was so important in the life of this loved one, that this was my most cherished dearest friend. I want to ignore the fact that I didn't get to the hospital regularly, or I don't even want to deal with the guilt that I might have become short-tempered with them as they entered into the critical stages of their illness.

So, we all have this baggage that we want to ignore -- the baggage of the day-to-day human dealings with someone we loved. We want to ignore the fact that our relationship was human with its ups and downs, its bumps and bruises. But, I'm telling you that this baggage has to be dealt with, especially if we are going to find peace and if our loved one is going to move on into the mystery of the Sacred Heart -- if we are to move closer together into the heart of Jesus. After

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, he says, "Untie him and let him go free." Forgiving our beloved departed and allowing them to forgive us is an important prayer event that can help us move on. So, one of the prayers I'm going to suggest is a prayer of forgiveness for those who have passed on.

I realize that what binds us together is the common experience of loss -- and yet each loss is unique. This kind of prayer of asking for forgiveness from a loved one and receiving forgiveness from that loved one may be more critical for some than for others. For those who experienced particular tragedies in their life: the loss of a loved one through suicide or through abortion, this kind of prayer is indispensable. But even in less intense experiences of loss, I'm thinking of the loss of a spouse or a parent in particular, this prayer of asking for and receiving forgiveness is important. We live in a day and an age where there is so much work that is being done in the field of recovery -- recovery from addictions, reclaiming our lost, inner child, the work of people like Melanie Beatty and John Bradshaw. As we begin to uncover some of the woundedness of our own past, we start to see the roles that were played by our parents or by some significant person in our life. If that parent who might have hurt us is now deceased, part of the work of recovery and healing is the work of forgiveness. As Jesus says to Martha and Mary in the gospel, "Unbind him and let him go free." In a moment, we can discover together some ways in which we can pray for that unbinding.

Another kind of prayer that I'm going to suggest is that we try to allow Jesus to unbind us and let us go free. Here, I think it is so critical that our prayer be as honest and as unedited as we possibly can make it. If we grew up feeling that we should never answer back our parents, then all the more we felt that we could never really bare our feelings of frustration, disappointment or anger before God. The older we get, the more sophisticated our prayer becomes -- but sadly, our prayer isn't a prayer from the heart but a prayer from the head. In this prayer I'm going to suggest, I will ask you to imagine yourself like a little child again. After all, it was Jesus himself who said that unless you become like a little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of God. In this prayer, I will talk about becoming a child again with all the freedom that a child has to express emotions of hurt and disappointment. In this prayer, we will ask Jesus not to explain death away (after all, we're children and we aren't interested in those philosophical answers) but to give us all the things that we miss from our loved ones.

And so, the first prayer experience I wish to express is to try to get ourselves to speak to Jesus like a child. In the gospels we hear how Jesus said "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them." He also said, "Unless you become like a little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven." Children don't edit anything -- they are honest with their feelings (if we let them) and honest with their needs.

These meditations work best if someone is leading us or guiding us through the imagery. Perhaps you might ask a friend to slowly read these meditation exercises to you -- or perhaps even read them slowly yourself into a tape recorder and then play it back for yourself.

And so, uncross your legs, sit as upright as you can, and breathe deeply. Inhale. One. . .two. .

.three. . .four. . . and exhale slowly one. . . two. . . three. . . four. (Repeat this several times). Picture your house when you were about five years old. Remember what the living room looked like? What kind of furniture did you have? Do you remember the front door? Stand by the front door as a five- year-old child. If you are a girl, try to remember the favorite dress you would wear. If your a little boy, try to remember your favorite shoes. Look at your dress. . . shoes. . . Now, open the front door and through the screen door, look outside. Remember what the street in front of your house looked like. Remember what the front stoop looked like. Now you leave the house. . . and you walk down to the street. Across the street, you see the neighbor's house -- the walkway and the stoop. There are a lot of little children sitting on the stoop, and they are all sitting around a man. You recognize the man as Jesus. You want to run across the street, but you're a little shy. . . but then Jesus catches your eye and he waves you over. You go across the street, and as you walk up the sidewalk to your neighbor's stoop, all the other children leave. You then walk over to Jesus and he stretches out his arms and you climb up in his lap. What does sitting on his lap feel like? As you sit there, Jesus asks you your name. You tell him. He repeats your name over and over and says, "That's a beautiful name." Then he looks into your eyes and Jesus' brow begins to furrow. He sees you're upset and he asks, "What's the matter? Something is wrong. . . Do you want to tell me what's wrong?" And then you begin to pour out your heart. You tell him all your disappointment and hurt and frustration and anger. Jesus pulls his arms around you as you begin to cry. . . and sob. Let yourself cry like a little child. Jesus holds you close to his chest -- so close that you can feel his garment against your cheek. Jesus doesn't say anything. He just holds you. While he holds you there, feel all the love in his arms, in his embrace, in his heart just envelope you. He gives you all you need right now -- all the ways you need to be loved. All the ways you were loved by your loved one but now cannot receive. Stay there for a while. . . . Let Jesus take his fingers and wipe away the tears from each of your eyes. .

Jesus now stands up and takes you by the hand. You feel his large hands take your tiny hand as you cross the street. He walks you up the walkway to your own house. As you open the door, you stand there and give Jesus a big hug. He tells you, "I'll be here whenever you want me."

The second meditation: This is a meditation that can be adapted in many ways. The main focus of the meditation is to be able to address some of the unfinished business with your loved one. Before you begin the meditation, ask Jesus to reveal to your heart that person whom you wish to pray for right now.

So, once again, uncross your legs, sit as upright as you can, and breathe deeply. Inhale: one... two... three... four... and exhale slowly one... two... three... four. (Repeat this several times). You are walking through the woods. There is a path you are follow-ing. It is a bright and sunny day. You look up and you see the sun filtering through the trees. You are aware of all the greenery of the woods. . . . the ferns, the bushes, the trees. . . You come to a clearing in the woods and you decide to sit down. How does the moist ground feel underneath you? Feel a gentle breeze blowing against your cheek. Listen to the birds crowing overhead. From the other side of the clearing, you see a path that leads back into the woods. As you sit there, you see two people emerge from the woods. The first person is Jesus, and he leads by the hand the person you love. They make their way toward you. . . How do you feel when you see Jesus and your loved one together? They walk toward you in the clearing and sit right on the

ground facing you. You have so much you want to say to your loved one, but you don't know where to start. You begin to share with your loved one some of your regrets -- some of the things that you wanted to say to your loved one but never got the chance, some of the things you wish you had never done. As you speak, you are afraid to look into the face of your loved one, afraid of what kind of a look that might be there. Finally, you stop speaking and you look up. Your loved one looks at Jesus and together they smile -- your loved one then turns to you and is still smiling. Hear your loved one say to you, "It's all right, it's O.K. I know what you are feeling. I forgive you. I love you." Allow Jesus to take the hand of your loved one and place it on your heart. Allow your loved one to speak to you words that ask for your forgiveness. Maybe there is a particular incident that your loved one wants to address -- a situation for which they never had the chance to say, "I'm sorry." Listen to those words, "I'm sorry." Feel that person's hand on your shoulder.

Allow Jesus to place his arms around both of you. Stay quiet in this presence for a while. All three of you stand up together. When you feel that you are ready, take your loved one's hand and place it in the hand of Jesus. Watch Jesus and your loved one walk back across the clearing into the woods from where they emerged. Your loved one turns around and says one last parting word to you. What does your loved one say to you?