

# **Infancy Loss Awareness Day**

## **St. Teresa of Avila**

Gardens of Gethsemani

15 October 2018

Dear Father Stan, Father Larry, Deacon Ken, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ, especially those who tonight are remembering the loss of their child before birth or as an infant:

### ***Introduction***

As you know, the Lord gathers us this evening, right in the middle of the month dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, our Archdiocese's patroness, to recall the loss of those precious little ones of ours whose coming into being at conception was warmly welcomed but did not come to birth and the loss of those infants whose life with their parents was all too brief.

For you, the expectations and joys of pregnancy, the months of planning not just for the birth of your child, but also for his or her life in the years to come, and, in some cases, the premature death of your child – all of this hope was cut short and replaced with untold pain and grief. In such situations, even for women and men of faith, a question inevitably arises: Why our little one? Why us? No greater test of faith can be asked of a person than that of seeing the hand of God in such circumstances.

I always think here of Mary, who, at the foot of the Cross, made

her second *fiat* or “yes” of trust in God’s plan, perhaps even greater than the first *fiat* she uttered as a young girl in her home at Nazareth. On Calvary she is mature, honed already by the trials of life – exile in Egypt, her Son’s being lost in the Temple, her being largely on the margins of his public ministry. Yet here on the hill she had to grasp with the light of faith that her Jesus’ tortuous Death was indeed his will and the Father’s will for the salvation of the world. The Church’s liturgical chant sums up her grief in the *Stabat Mater*: “At the Cross, her station keeping; stood the mournful Mother weeping; close to Jesus to the last.” Tears and trust in God’s merciful love – no easy feat for her – is what kept Mary standing.

For reasons we shall never understand in this life, the Lord chose to bring your child into the fullness of eternal life with him, without passing through the pilgrimage of earthly life.

When a baby dies before it is born or soon after birth, parents are burdened with the task of saying goodbye to someone they barely had a chance to know but whom they loved with a love beyond all telling.

Tonight, in the company of the Angels and Saints – and with your little ones before the throne of God – is a time for you, and for all of us, to remember each little one by name, just as the Lord himself holds them forever close to his heart.

Admittedly we live in a culture that doesn’t deal well with death, especially with pregnancy loss and infant death. Losing an infant is so

unthinkable and shocking that many don't want to, or can't, talk about it. We know this is not the right road to take. Parents and family and friends who surround them should not shut out the pain or never mention their loss. On the contrary, they should talk openly about the baby who has died and recognize their pain.

All of us join in prayer with you and for you, dear parents, relatives and friends, who mourn, sometimes even after many years, the loss of your child. It is my hope that our promise of prayer and solidarity will bring you consolation and renewed hope in the eternal life the good Lord promises to those who are blameless in his sight and whom he has called to himself, even though this is not the time we would have chosen.

### ***Readings***

In today's First Reading, chosen specifically for the memorial of St. Teresa of Avila, St. Paul speaks of hope, and insists that "hope that is seen is not hope" (Rom 8:24). He is calling the Christians of Rome – and us today – to live by faith that God's purposes for his creation will be fully and finally be realized in his good time, and to live by hope that these promises will not just be for creation as a whole but for us and for those whom we love.

Benedict XVI once said that hope "consists in the knowledge of God, in the discovery of the heart of the good and merciful Father. Jesus, with his death on the Cross and his Resurrection, has revealed his Face to us, the face of a God so great in love as to communicate to us an

uncrushable hope that not even death can break.”<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospel, Jesus uses a beautiful image to tell us how closely he is united with us – and this, I would say – from conception to eternal life. By grace we are attached to him as branches are attached to the trunk of the vine. This is “abiding” in Jesus – his being with us, and our being with him.

It is because of his presence with us, not by our own “smarts” or gifts that we are able to bear the kind of fruit, “apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5) to live the kind of life, that is pleasing to him.

This is a consoling Gospel for it reminds us of the constancy and fidelity of Jesus’ love for us. He “abides” with us, and we “abide” with him. Certainly we are “followers” of Christ, who walk after him, but, perhaps even more, we are yoked to him, bound to him with ties of love. That means he walks not just before us but beside us and with us.

### ***Conclusion***

Since today we are celebrating St. Teresa of Avila, the great mystic and reformer of the Church in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Spain, let me conclude by citing one of her best known prayers, which is particularly applicable for this Eucharist on Infancy Loss Awareness Day: “Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing;

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (2 December 2007).

God alone suffices.” Solo Dios basta.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver