

August 7th, 2020

I'm still reeling from learning the other day of Gary's death, and I've heard from enough of you to know I'm not alone. While on an intellectual level we know to expect death at any time, and on another level we know that a healthy engagement with our mortality is the key to our spiritual maturity, the sheer surprise with which death can operate continues to bring us up short.

Without (I hope!) falling into the trap of moralizing, and apart from the specific requirements of grief, what it brings up for me is the urgency of every given moment: the urgency that we live in such a way as to be always "in love and charity with our neighbors," and if we are not, to take the first steps towards forgiveness and reconciliation. There is no time to lose. There is nothing noble or holy about holding a grudge, there is only death in cherishing old wounds.

When I'm preparing someone to make their first confession, I often suggest they take as a model the ten commandments. Most people look at the commandments and are relieved by the ones they haven't consciously broken. But, to me, the more valuable exercise is to start from the assumption that I've broken every one of them (in some fashion or another) and then explore how and in what ways that might be true. The point is not to stew in guilt or shame; the point is to take away any vestige of pride or self-satisfaction, and make me come to grips with the relationships I have impaired, either by misdeed or neglect.

Peace is the only way out: certainly God grants absolution to the penitent, but not to make us feel better — rather to introduce us to the larger world forgiveness creates, with all the pain and grief it entails, of stepping away from the known past and into the unknown future, of letting go the weapons of war and defense both, and being made new by the mystery and suffering of grace — a divine mystery mediated especially through the love we bear one another.

So let us take stock of our various loves, and not shrink from the work of seeking forgiveness earnestly and offering it freely. So may we inhabit a new and fuller gratitude, and offer a truer and greater thanksgiving. So may we enter a more divine humanity, both now and beyond the gates of death.

With love and prayers,

Fr. Blake+