

Healing Rituals

When someone we love dearly dies, we are faced with a significant transition – the move from living our life with them to being without them. We may wonder if life will ever be the same – Will I ever feel normal again?

Our faith tells us that our loved one has moved on to the new world - in the heart of God, where there are no more tears, no more mourning, no more suffering. Like our loved one, we too have to cross over to a new world. It may help to think of this process as a river which we have to cross – a river of tears, loss, grief, separation, fear, adjustments and a whole range of emotions, many of which we cannot understand. Symbolically, we have to build a bridge to get from one side to the other. There are many building blocks in our bridge – the love and support of family and friends; the compassion of colleagues at work or at school; our inner resources, some of which until now, were untapped; our desire to help others in our family circle to adjust; fond memories that help in sustaining us; and the Spirit of God who walks closely with us.

There is also another type of building block – ritual. Rituals are helpful when we need to move from one stage of life to another. They can be very soothing when we are going through the intense grief. Rituals tend to touch us on a deep emotional and spiritual level. As well as honouring our loved one, rituals provide a safe way to express emotions. They provide structure and stability during chaos and instability. Another beautiful aspect of the ritual, is that it can be planned. Even the care given in planning the ritual can be a great source of comfort.

There are the rituals of saying good-bye to our beloved. For example, there is the gathering of family and friends at the funeral home to pray and to pay their respects to the deceased; the funeral Mass and other funeral service; the prayer service at the grave. During these memorial services we place our loved one in God's care. We ask God to bring peace and comfort to their family and loved ones.

Rituals can continue to be a source of help long after the time of the funeral and burial. We place flowers on our loved one's grave site; we attend special prayer services; we light candles in their memory. We keep pictures around our home and other treasures to remember them by. Through rituals we continue to honour the person and the different shared relationships. Rituals help us to touch the deep sense of grief we are experiencing rather than pretend it doesn't exist. Through ritual, we recognize and accept our grief, we share it. Eventually those deeply-felt emotions become less intense.

When we are feeling sad, it is good to have a ritual. To do this, you need to choose symbols that are meaningful. For example, if your loved one was fond of a particular type of flower or had a favourite song, these could be included in the ritual. If they liked to go to a particular park setting, restaurant or pub, perhaps the ritual could be held there.

Special occasions - Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, Easter, anniversaries and birthdays could also include a ritual – share a fond memory, toast our loved one, or light a candle to remind us of when their light shone brightly among us. In Christ we are all one. This means that the love we share never ever dies.

Our lives will change but the love we shared goes on forever. Rituals help to bridge the gap between what was and our new reality. When we invite God into our ritual, opening our hearts to the Spirit, rituals join earth and heaven – time and eternity. They lift our awareness of God's presence in our journey here on earth.

Not every family member or friend may be comfortable with overtly spiritual types of ritual. That is okay. The ritual doesn't need to be visibly spiritual because by its nature it is intrinsically spiritual. It is spiritual in that it invites us to go deeper and walk through our pain to healing and new understanding. For example, a widow took a few of her in-laws and her children to the races to commemorate the first anniversary of her husband's death. Her husband had owned and raced a couple of horses during his lifetime and she had good memories about going to the races. This was her way of honouring his memory and allowing the ritual to touch her at that deeper emotional and spiritual level.

There is no time limit on having rituals. They are appropriate and even necessary as long as healing is needed; as long as love is celebrated; as long as we desire the memory of our loved one to be honoured and celebrated.

MINISTRY OF
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HEALING RITUALS

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