

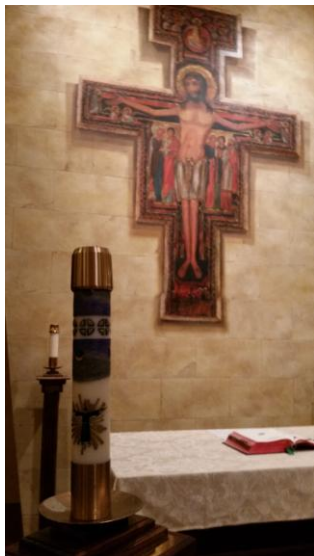


St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center



St. Anthony Shrine & Ministry Center Emmaus Ministry for Grieving Parents One-Day Retreat February 13, 2016

The middle of February is typically a dreadful time in New England and this year is no exception. Worries of snowstorms, ice dams, and gale-force winds abound; our focus seems to be constantly on the weather. Christmas is long gone and Lent is upon us. Spring is only a faint hope of the future.

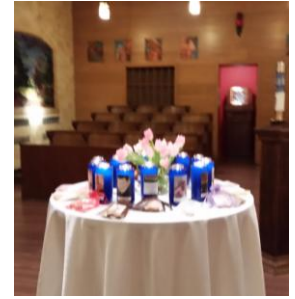


A perfect time for an Emmaus Ministry retreat! Actually, it was. Spending an entire day in the Friary of St. Anthony Shrine felt like entering into a cocoon, at least for a time. As you enter the elevator and travel to the 5th floor, you are physically and mentally carried out of one world and into the next. As the day goes on, you are transported emotionally and spiritually as well. And that is the beauty of these retreats.

At this retreat we were joined by 16 parents from three states (MA, RI, and PA) whose children had died. Ages at the time of death ranged from 10 years to 40 years. Causes of death included accident, illness, heroin overdose, suicide, and homicide. Time since the death ranged from two-thirteen years. Couples comprised half of the group; mothers comprised the other half, as is usually the case, although recently we have seen a significant increase in the number of fathers who feel called to come individually.

As always, the retreat opened with a very emotional prayer service during which we heard about the significance of LIGHT, which is repeated over and over again in our faith... Christ is the Light of the world; the Light of the world will never die. Our children, living in the

Light of Christ, are the light of our worlds and, like Christ, will live forever and never die. We look to them to light our way. During the prayer service we lit beautiful blue candles to remind us of the very real presence of the Holy Spirit and of our children.



After a short break, we met in the Friary's Library for a stirring reflection given by Fr. Eric Carpine, OFM on **"Brokenness."**

What grieving parent can't relate to the concept of brokenness? It was an absolutely beautiful reflection on the "before" and "after" of losing a child. *"You are not the parent of a 'lost' child,"* said Fr. Eric. *"You haven't lost your child; you know exactly where he/she is—with God! But what we have to deal with now is the brokenness of our lives... the 'before and the after'."*

On a small table in the middle of the circle of parents were shards of a once-beautiful vessel that had been broken.

Fr. Eric talked about Scripture verses often used to portray the tremendous suffering and brokenness of Jesus on Calvary... as well as those who feel their lives can never be put back together again. "If you are one of these broken-hearted ones, this could be your cry," he said...

For all my foes I am an object of reproach, a laughing stock to my neighbors, and a dread to my friends; those who see me flee from me. I am forgotten like the unremembered dead; I am like a dish that is broken. (Psalm 31: 12-13)

Fr. Eric's Reflection beautifully spoke to the brokenness each of us struggles with every day. It was a beautiful perspective on the pain that we carry constantly, the hope that gets us through, and the knowledge that some day we will be whole again. [For the complete Reflection, see the end of these Highlights.]

The discussion then turned to Mary, our Blessed Mother, and how she understands our pain and brings us comfort. We listened—and related to--the very poignant lyrics to the song... [*Still Her Little Child*](#) by Ray Boltz and Steve Millikin.

Next Eileen M served as a parent witness giving her very moving reflection on her own spiritual journey after the death of her dear son, Eric.

"I often believed that I was one of God's favorite children because I always got what I prayed for," she said. *"God was like a big sugar daddy to me and prayer was like magic...until the death of my son when everything changed. I stopped praying for a long time."*



“Gradually I began trying to let God off the hook, she said, “I began to pray again, but my prayer is different now. It’s much simpler now”.

Somewhere along my journey, I read the statement, ‘We’re all spiritual beings having a human experience.’ When I think of this statement, I elaborate and continue the thought.....Someday our existence will be spiritual beings having a constant spiritual experience. And that’s the day we all get to see our children again.”

Throughout the day at various sessions, reflections shared by parents included...

- *“I didn’t need to go up and touch the chards on the table during Fr. Eric’s reflection. I can put my hand on my heart and I can feel them every day.”*
- *“My grandson, in a college entrance essay, described his life right now without his father... I have been a member of a crew team for many years; consequently, I spend most of my athletic life from the ‘behind’ perspective... working very hard, but looking back at where we were... where we are...and where we are coming from. To be able to do well, I need to have total trust in the person who has control of where I am going because I cannot see. Since the death of my father, I have developed that trust in the Lord because I know of no other way.”*
- *“We are all spiritual beings having a human experience. Our children are now spiritual beings after having a human experience.”*
- *In the absolute depths of our pain at not having our children with us today, it is good to remember the fact that...our children were never really “ours” to begin with. They were always a gift from God given to us to take care of. We have now given them back to Him and they are at peace.*

And, reflecting on the day as its end drew near, parents said...

- *“Fr. Eric once again brought a new level of understanding and hope in my journey. I walk away today knowing that God moves slowly and I have hope in putting the broken pieces back together.*
- *“I have felt so lonely in my pain. This day allowed me to release some of it.”*
- *“I came because my wife wanted to come, but I received a great blessing—god opened my eyes.”*
- *“I would have liked for it to have been longer.”*
- *“I honestly received much more than I expected.”*

After a very moving Closing Prayer Service that included the Sacrament of the Anointing and the Laying on of Hands by the friars...another Emmaus Ministry Retreat for Grieving Parents ended. We left with a “Spirit-inspired” glow deep in our hearts.

BROKENNESS: A REFLECTION

Fr. Eric Carpine, OFM

PRAYER:

Part of the beginning of your prayer time is either to take a whole piece of paper and tear it into shreds or to break a jar into pieces. In doing this, you are acknowledging the pain and the harshness you feel in your brokenness and which you are crying out to God in your pain. After the breaking of glass or tearing of paper, read the following reflection:

REFLECTION:

Jesus, your brokenness was real. All the joy of being alive, all the beauty you saw in earthen things, all the people you knew and loved, all the satisfaction of healing, all the blessedness of your teachings, all the love you knew and shared, all of this—shattered on that hillside. You were torn apart, broken, smashed. All of life's joy seemingly destroyed, terrible pain stretching out your agony. Only a handful of loved ones could take your brokenness away. You were a broken piece of pottery, dashed against the stones of life, a thing to be thrown away, your flesh a ghastly thing to see, and your aching spirit a painful knowing. On the cross that Calvary day, the sacred unity seemed torn apart. Like a broken dish, like a broken dish, you went to your grave.

PRAYER:

Imagine your life as a pottery jar. See your life broken apart. Look at all the pieces, harsh and jagged. Touch and embrace the shards. Now gather the pieces together. See yourself taking them to Jesus. Have Him hold the pieces in his hands. Listen to Him tell you about His brokenness, how the Father raised him from the dead and brought him to a wonderful wholeness. See the pieces of pottery in Jesus' hands come together into a beautiful jar—albeit with cracks, but a beautiful jar. Then open your hands and receive the jar in its wholeness from Jesus.

Pray your response:

Closing Prayer:

Jesus, you were once broken apart. You know how it feels to be so shattered by the goodbyes of life. Help me to believe that I will one day experience wholeness again, that I will not have this terrible feeling of being torn into many pieces. Keep reminding me often that the Father raised you to new life, to a powerful wholeness that you had not known before. Encourage me to believe that, in time, I will no longer have this deep pain and hurt in my heart. I want to believe. Help my unbelief!
Amen.