

Fear, the daily bread of the sick!



Fear... I meet with it every Thursday when, as a volunteer in spiritual care at a large Montreal hospital, I visit sick people. Ah! Not only fear of course, but many fears.

I meet people who are there because of an infection, a fracture, an amputation, heart surgery, cancer, or as they are taking their last journey ...

I am neither a doctor nor a nurse, so I am not there to heal their bodies. I am there to take care of "their souls."

I take the time to listen and I hear, in different words for each person, the fears experienced by these sick persons. Fear is omnipresent in the hospital.

Fear of suffering, of being in pain and enduring pain.

Fear of solitude, of having no one close for comfort.

Fear of the upcoming night.

Fear of going into a long-term care facility, of being moved away or being forgotten, of not receiving good care or of having to leave the beloved family home.



Fear of having a test done without knowing why.

Fear of the questions asked in order to ascertain their health issues.

Fear of losing faculties, of becoming dependent and being helpless to slow down the body's decline.

Fear of the specialist's "verdict."

Fear of dying. That fear traumatizes a lot of people.

I listen to them with my loving heart. I touch them with a lot of tenderness. I look at them in the name of Jesus, somewhat as he would. I feel like I make a difference for them.

I take the time. Oh! Not enough time because other people are waiting for my visit. But I use all the compassion that is in me.

There are often tears in their eyes, but they are tears that say, “thank you for just being there; thank you for touching me; I need to be heard and understood...”

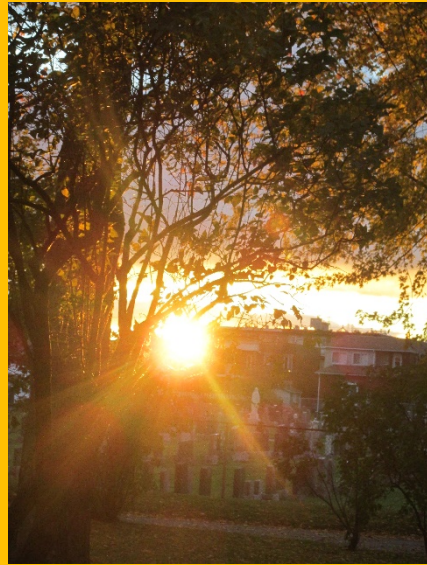
They apologize as if crying were bad.

Fear is often caused by the unknown.

Especially the unknown in facing death.

When I feel it is appropriate, I allow myself to provide comforting words. These words are often dictated by the Presence within me for whom I am only the instrument. It is as if Jesus were talking through me.

As for the fear of dying, it is the unknown of “the afterlife,” it is the worry about hell...those old tales with which the Church of yesteryear enjoyed filling the minds and hearts of people who could only bow down before this threatening curse. This was far from Jesus’ message.



Then I gladly talk to them about the loving God in whom I believe. A God who cannot have “invented” hell or purgatory since he is Merciful. A God who rejects suffering. A God with his arms open ready to welcome with so much tenderness the person coming to Him.



I have the inclination to tell them the words of John Paul II: *Do not be afraid! He is with you and carries you.* I don’t say it if I feel that the person is not ready to receive this evidence. But I pray to the One who showed us the Father.

And when I offer them the Eucharist, I present the host like an “overdose” of love. This puts a smile on their faces.

I notice that when a dying person believes in this God of infinite love, the one in whom I believe, there is hardly any fear of

“the last journey” because the person is aware that the light is waiting.

In his book *Tout Doris*, Doris Lussier wrote: *To die is to be born into reality. It is to go from darkness into light. When a human being dies, it is not a mortal life that ends but an immortal one that begins. Dying is as beautiful as being born. Isn’t a sunset as beautiful as a sunrise?*

Thank you Doris.

Monique Bourgeois

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