

# Grieving During the Holidays

I know this is the first page you turn to, but this time I thought I'd do something different. One group of people who may absolutely dread the coming holiday season are those who have lost loved ones in the past year. In addition, they would be apt to avoid the quiet moments because they're afraid of what emotions might burst forth.

The information below was put together by Sr. Marie Micheletto, RSM, of the Archdiocese of Omaha.

- Avoid what gives you the blues.
- When asked, "What can I do to help you?" ... have your list.
- Acknowledge to yourself, to another, that holidays may bring emotions and memories to the surface.
- Share stories about your loved one (i.e. If ... were here, you know what ... would say! Remember when ...?)
- You may feel sad. Feelings are neither good nor bad; it's what you do with them that makes a difference.  
Let the sadness come ... don't fight it ... it will pass.
- Re-evaluate old traditions and family rituals. Do you want to keep observing them? Want a change?  
A different way to celebrate?
- Plan something to look forward to on January 2 ... after the holidays.
- It's OK to set limits. Let others know what you can do or don't want to do, as well as how much you want to do for the holidays.
- Find opportunities for support.
- Count your blessings ... make a list.
- Look for the true meaning behind the holiday.
- Slow down as best you can (inside and outside).
- Do something good for yourself at least once a day ... this little treat will get you over some of the rough spots in the day.
- Take some time for prayer, meditation and sitting quietly in God's presence. Recite Psalm 23.
- Don't feel guilty if you find yourself having a good time. Your loved one would want you to be happy.
- Do something for someone else. Helping others does much to ease the pain. Reach out and touch someone.
- Given that the holidays are especially difficult times, schedule activities that you find particularly comforting for these times.

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# CROSS LINKS

CONGREGATION OF HOLY CROSS, UNITED STATES PROVINCE OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS  
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Dear hearts and gentle souls ...

Are you surprised to get this December newsletter so early? I'm surprised I got it out to you by the deadline of November 17! It seemed like just yesterday that I wrote the November reflection on praying for the dead.

But actually, there were constant reminders of the deadline by Carol and Kim. I tried to tell them that the Muse doesn't respond to deadlines; when she's there I can write this newsletter in a couple hours. When she's not, it's an exercise in futility to try to write anything.

Still, the reminders came. "Nag, nag, nag," I muttered a couple Fridays ago, half aloud. Five of us were sitting in the office and I asked Jim, "Does your wife nag you like this?" For some reason he wouldn't answer. I asked him if he nagged his wife, and he shook his head "No." So I said: "See ... real men don't nag." Sue chips in: "No, they whine."

## Christmas Prayer

During the Christmas Season (which runs 'til January 11, 2015) we will be remembering you and yours in our prayers and at Mass. Jot their names on the included prayer sheet and return it.

This is our gift to you — therefore no offering is needed.

But, (there's always a "but," right?!) if any gift is included, it will be used to meet the needs for education and health care of the oldest and youngest members of the community.

Carol said: "They vex." Kim said: "They annoy." Sigh. No last word possible there.

Anyway, we're entering into the holiday season, a time when the whole universe seems to conspire to nag you to do this and that, to get this soon, to place your order or to ship things out before a certain date, etc. With that in mind, I penned the reflection inside. PLEASE try to give yourself an Advent/Christmas present of some quiet time and space. It will make all the difference in your relationship to others and to God. Giving yourself that space could ultimately be the best present you give your loved ones, co-workers and friends.

Since November, two Holy Cross priests have moved past space and time into eternal life. On November 4, **Rev. Paul G. Wendel C.S.C.**, died at Holy Cross House; on November 9, **Rev. John VandenBossche, C.S.C.**, joined his Holy Cross family in heaven.

Fr. Paul served in the Armed Forces and then discerned a vocation to Holy Cross. During his priestly life, he was a high school teacher, a parish priest, Assistant Superior at Moreau Seminary, an administrator at Notre Dame, a retreat master and spiritual director at Fatima Retreat House. For the last ten years of his life, he lived at and ministered to the men at Holy Cross House.

Fr. John did a little bit of everything during his priestly ministry. He was a student, a physics teacher and principal in Bangladesh, a guidance counselor and chaplain, a parish priest, a Superior and an Assistant Superior. May he and Fr. Paul rest in peace.

I close out this note by thanking you for your love and care over the past year, and I know I'm joined in this by the members of the Development staff. We all wish for you and yours a happy, gentle Christmas and a New Year where hope reigns supreme over cynicism and fear. In our own small ways, we can make the world a better place. Do what you can, and God will fill in the rest.

Thank you for being you!

*Fr. Paul*

*☺ Hugs!*

# SILENCE AND THE CHRISTMAS RUSH

They were definitely written for an earlier era!

*“O little town of Bethlehem,  
how still we see thee lie;  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,  
the silent stars go by...  
How silently, how silently  
The wondrous gift is given!”*

*“Silent night, holy night;  
All is calm, all is bright...  
Sleep in heavenly peace.”*

*“It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old, ...  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing.”*

*“The First Noel, the Angels did say  
Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay....”*

So much of the Christmas story seems to take place in silence. The one time the silence was broken was when Luke had the angels coming from stage right. Even then, the angels did not appear in the cave in Bethlehem. They did not regale the Christ Child and his parents with song. That was probably the wise thing to do: after the labor of giving birth, Mary probably wasn't in any mood for a song-fest! (You don't really think that Mary gave birth to Jesus with none of the usual pain of labor, contractions, pushing, etc...do you?).

So the angels appeared to a group of shepherds on the hillside outskirts of town. It is almost as if the angels were under strict orders to keep quiet about the whole affair, but could not keep their promise out of sheer, exuberant joy. So they broke their silence for one glorious moment, behind God's back (after all, for the first time in history God could be said to have a back!).

This is an enormous truth that our civilization seems hell-bent on forgetting. Strangely, we seem most determined to forget it during the very season that celebrates it. It is the same truth found throughout the Scriptures, and the same truth that all of the saints throughout history have repeated. It is simply this: that God is encountered in silence. Indeed, without silence one will never come to know God.

Our Christmas season is filled with noise. Everywhere you go, Christmas music blares from speakers. TV commercials constantly remind you that you have to get this, that, or the other thing in order to have a Merry Christmas...excuse me...have a happy holiday (gotta be politically correct, y'know). Grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, traffic jams, waiting in endless lines at Target or Wal-Mart, dealing with the lack of courtesy in the store aisles or on the streets, the clamor of little tykes who want this and that and wonder if Santa is here yet, the worry as you watch your budget going down the drain, the tensions with relatives and family members, and dealing with the weather if you're traveling.

Did I forget anything? Oh yes ... the social media. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Internet shopping, texting ... that's easily two or three hours out of an already full day.

Silence is a gift we crave, a present we need, as our hectic days long for a place where no one can reach us. The great medieval philosopher, Meister Eckhart, wrote that “The language God speaks is silence.”

But, you don't need convincing, do you? Our lives are noisy, high decibel, unrelenting cacophony. I have no doubt that there are times when you long for those moments when “all is calm, all is bright.”

And really ... it is these moments that I am thinking about. I know that it is near impossible for most people to take significant time each day to sit in silence, especially at this time of year. Even if you are able to find that significant time, you quickly become distraught and upset over the noise that fills your mind. You're trading exterior noise and bustle for interior noise and what we call “monkey mind.”

Moments ... I **know** there are moments in your day when you can pull away from the noise and activity for a few brief moments.

If it's snowing, for example, go out on the porch or deck, and ponder the silent fall of the snowflakes and the stillness it brings to the world. Hold out your coat sleeve and catch a few snowflakes ... you may be able to see the actual crystal structure. God will speak to you and you will feel whole.

You'll be waiting in line a lot these days, either in stores or in traffic. Turn off the radio or pull out your ear buds. Leave the phone alone. Just sit or stand and be silent. Contemplate your fellow drivers or shoppers. Pray for them. Breathe deeply and consciously - in and out, in and out. Close your eyes and briefly go to your “happy place.” God will speak to you and you will feel calm.

Stand in the bedroom door and contemplate your sleeping children. Contemplate your spouse as he or she moves around the kitchen or living room. Let your eyes have that “love look” in them. After all, these are the most precious people in your life. God will speak to you and you will be filled with peace.

Turn off all the lights. Sit before the lit-up Christmas tree, or the fire, or a few candles. If with someone special, have some physical contact. God will speak to you and you will know that all is good.

At work, is there a quiet place you can go to at lunch, or during break? Is there a window where you can sit or stand and simply watch the trees or the people for a few minutes? Can you take a deliberate, conscious walk around the block? By “deliberate and conscious” I mean awareness of your footsteps, the movements of your body, the tickle of the cold on your nose, the steam of your breathing, etc. God will speak to you and you will know your place in the world.

Fast from social media for a half hour before you go to bed. Use that time to read, to unwind, to listen to music, to pray the rosary or look at the next day's Scripture readings. This will offer the additional benefit of helping you sleep. Research shows that if one is active on electronic instruments right up until bedtime, their sleep patterns will suffer.

Go to daily Mass - that's 20-30 minutes of relative quiet in which you are nourished by Word and Sacrament. If you're lucky enough to live or work near a church that is open during the day, that can be a wonderful opportunity to let God refresh you for 5, 10, 15 minutes or longer. It doesn't even have to be a Catholic church; after all, every worship space is consecrated to God.

Indulge your body. Take a long hot bath or shower; let the family know you are not to be disturbed for the next 30 minutes or longer. Treat yourself to a silent massage and let the masseuse know you wish to be silent. After all, God thought human bodies were the neatest things he ever made. That's why he wanted one for himself.

As I said above, I know for a fact that you *can* find the time to de-stress and find some silence and peace. If you crave it enough, you will find it. And if you don't crave it ... or really can't find the time ... then I will pray that somehow, someway, the Lord will support you as you move through the holiday season.