

## This document contains multiple reflections by St. Julies' Parishoners on the Raising of Lazarus from the Dead.

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### Reflection by Jeanine Jensen

*(Hope in the midst of crisis. Recovery, addiction, broken relationship, new life from brokenness. Experience of recovery from a "death" situation. How have I risen from the ashes? How was hope a part of the journey.) (What did my hope look like?)*

*It was a cave with a stone laid across it. "Take away the stone", Jesus said. Martha replied, "Lord it has been four days now; surely there will be a stench."*

As I was preparing for today, this image of death and stench, or rather should I say the smell of death and stench stayed with me. I began to think about the times that I have smelled death. Maybe some of memories remind you of various deaths in your life.

I grew up on a farm where my mother, sister and I had our own assembly line of preparing a chicken for dinner. My job was to dip the dead chicken (that my mother had killed) into a bucket of hot water and pull off the feathers. This was not a pleasant smell and I apologize to any of you who are planning chicken for dinner today. But, in some fashion the feathers have to come off. The good thing was that by the time I sat down at the table the smell in my nostrils was gone, because mom had replaced the smell of death with the smell of spices, mashed potatoes and gravy.

I smelled the stench of death when I witnessed my next-door neighbor pull away from friends and family after he returned from the Viet Nam war. His spirit of fun and joy was gone except when he played with his small children. This same type of death continues to happen to many women and men today.

My family walked with my brother when the stench of death was so strong in the loss of his wife and the mother of his three small children, that he drowned the reality in alcohol. Yet even that smell slowly evaporated as time passed and his children grew to be strong, loving adults. He is now sober and enjoys his seven grandchildren.

At a very specific time of my life the smell of death entered into every cell of my body, it took my breathe away, made me sick to my stomach and turned my world, as I knew and loved it, upside down. It was the day that my husband of 27 yrs., came home and told me

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that we could no longer live together as husband and wife. Was I shocked? Not entirely, for if I was truthful with myself, I sensed that our relationship was dying. I simply could not imagine my life without him. Who was I if I were not his wife? Where was I to go? Did I have to leave my ministry at St. Julie's? What would happen to my, our family? Would our sons find themselves taking sides? Was there any hope that one day we could actually feel like a family once again? How was I going to explain to our families? (We were the first of 12 siblings to be divorced). Did I have to wear the big D on the middle of my forehead? So many questions! So many emotions, I felt like I was suffocating in this smell of death.

And so I grabbed onto everything and everyone for support. I clung to my sister on the phone, even though she lived in another state. I surrounded myself with friends who did not judge my husband or me, but gently walked with us for months and years. I bought books about the healing of mind, body and soul. I begged God to save me from a life of depression, resentment, anger, "poor me" attitude. My constant prayer was "God, don't let me become a witch!" If I had to give up the person I loved, I demanded that God do something worthwhile with both of us...to give us the freedom to BE whatever God willed.

There were times when I could not pray. My spiritual director would take me away where I could rest and she would pray aloud for me. I remember standing at mass and allowing the prayer of the people to be my prayer, for I no longer had words left in me.

It is in the midst of all of this death that I became aware of a new smell...the smell of freedom, transformation and new life. I now listened more closely and with less judgment to the stories of people who come to this Table in pain and anguish. I was blessed with the time and opportunity to walk with those who search for meaning in their lives, to pray with the sick, the dying at the hospital and in their homes. I had time to work toward a greater awareness of the role of women and men in the church, even divorced women and men, who are called to bring message of hope into a broken world.

What does my family look like today? The four of us live in different parts of the world. We gather each Christmas at my home and this past Christmas for the first time at Dad's home. We communicate on a regular basis and are always there for one another through good and bad times. Life is strange!!!! God is Good!!!!

In the midst of brokenness I have found hope in my family, friends, this community, and most importantly in the Christ who dwells within each human being and in the Eucharist. We all experience death in our lives, the death of a relationship, jobs, addictions, brokenness of spirit and so on. Where are you finding your hope in the midst of your crisis? We now invite you to write on the purple sheet of paper your crisis and or your hope. We will then place them in the hands of the Lord before this Altar today.

Jeanine Jensen

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### Reflection by Ricky Critchfield

St. Julie's found me a few years ago - right when I was asking myself what I wanted to do with the second half of my life. I've been happily married for almost 19 years, I have three wonderful kids, get paid to remodel people's homes and, have employees I'm responsible for and generally get along pretty well. But it was starting to feel hollow; not enough being with my family, not enough helping others, not enough taking care of me and my business is suffering. Being reminded that the two most important duties in my life are to serve God and serve my fellow man was the message I was listening for. I re-discovered my relationship to Christ; I remembered that I know how to be a friend to another person, I remembered that I love and adore my wife and children and would do anything for them, and I remembered that I have an important place in this world.

I'm no stranger to trouble. I did fine and had lots of promise when I was young, but somewhere after high school I lost sight of the difference between right and wrong and began making some lousy decisions. I was spiritually dead for years. I ended up living in a world of drugs and crime that helped me forget just about every good thing I'd been taught. I stayed addicted to drugs for too many years to count, and went crazy and did things that no man can be proud of for way too long. Everything you might expect followed - prison, drifting away from my family, alone and desperate. I ignored the voice of Christ in my heart. Deep down I believe that Christ wasn't letting go of me; even in the worst moments there was hope for a new life and a belief that it wasn't the true me behaving the way I did.

I was rescued back then by the police. When it was over in 1993, I had served 8 years in prison and didn't believe I had anything to offer when I got home. I was married to Cathe by then when my life and my marriage were rescued again by the birth of our child Kayla. Everything changed for me then; for the first time in my life I was responsible for someone other than myself. She's the reason I'm still here, still married and still sane, and when the twins were born I was the proudest daddy in the world. They seemed like a reward from heaven for having done so well for so long.

I needed to learn what it takes to introduce my children to a life inside the church. I love everything our Catholic Church has to offer. It's not only a re-birth for me in the sense most of us understand it; it feels like the world has changed totally because of my experience here. I've found comfort, friendship, and a place here that I intend to have be a large part of my children's lives for many years. It's an extension of what I felt back when I first saw my baby daughter, that sense of responsibility. My wife and I talked about it before we showed up on your doorstep, and we continue to appreciate and participate in as much of what this family is up to as we can. Going to help build houses, having myself, my wife, and my children all welcomed into the sacraments, joining the Knights, volunteering at our parish, Anything I can fit into my life - I do. Even during this past year or so as I'm been suffering with some old demons and causing those around me to suffer alongside, I can fix my sight on Christ and our Church for a way back into sanity. I pray harder now than ever for relief. It's why I think of Lazarus. So many of us would agree that the story of redemption and re-birth told in that story is

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something we can all relate to on a personal level. My relationship to St. Julies and the larger Church through communion and fellowship has made me into a new man.

What happened to Lazarus tells me a lot about the everyday struggles I have with faith, my recovery from addiction, my relationships with my wife and children. No matter how dead I feel in my spirit, I can turn to my faith and believe the impossible happens everyday. I've seen it in the re-birth of my relationship with Cathe, I see it in my the successes my children experience – even after being told when they were very little that we maybe shouldn't expect so much from them.

I experience gratitude in a new way. Lazarus and I have been re-born in a way that most people don't get to experience. My belief in what I've experienced here and the sense of gratitude I have for the second chances I've been given so many times are enough to get me by most days. It's still tough, especially right now, for my family and I. My family and my Church has never stopped supporting me and I hope and pray they feel the same way about me.

Ricky Critchfield

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Reflection by Wendy Aftowicz

I was asked to reflect on and speak today about what sustained me during a difficult time in my life. It wasn't very hard to reflect on as one "difficult" time in particular came immediately to mind. Just over a year ago, it was a year ago this month actually, my mom died after a long battle with multiple myeloma. We actually had her memorial service right here at St. Julie's.

Now, anyone who's watched a loved one deal with any sickness or cancer will tell you that it can be very difficult to find anything positive to hold onto through that kind of physical suffering. For me, the question was, "how do I stay strong through numerous hospital visits, multiple surgeries, a long stay in the ICU, chemo treatments, and dialysis? And just through her everyday pain and exhaustion?"

So how did I? As I thought about it I realized I was able to cope and find strength because she did. She showed all of us, me, my siblings, our family and friends what faith and hope look like. She was our example of what hope in the face of adversity really is. Especially in those last hours when she said, "I'm okay with what's happening." She did not despair, so I did not. She did not complain about the "unfairness" of it, so I did not. She didn't wonder, "why me?" so I didn't either. She was my example of steadfast hope in God's promise of peace.

There will be times in life when we all need examples of hope. In this time of Lent, let us remember that we are called to be imitators of Christ. In the second reading today, Paul reminds us to "join with others in being imitators of me...and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us." As I thought about this idea of following the example of Jesus, I turned to my copy of *The Imitation of Christ*, and found the following words fitting and inspiring....

"Don't let the labors you've assumed on My account break your spirit. Don't let the troubles I've sent you get you terribly down. My promise will strengthen and console you at every turn. I'm flush enough to reward you beyond all means and measures. And remember this. You won't have to labor long for this. Keep watch for a little while, and then you'll see a swift end to all evils. The hour will come when all labor and tumult will cease."

And also...."In you, therefore, my Lord God, I place my whole hope and refuge. In You also I place all my sore spots and tight spots. In You everything looks firm and stable; outside You, everything's fluid and chaotic."

As you contemplate these words and what they mean to you, please turn your attention to the small purple slip of paper on your chairs. Jesus brought us hope even as he journeyed to the cross, and I have tried to bring a hopeful message to you today. Now, I'd like you to think about what hopeful message you can bring to others in hard times. It may be "when God closes a door, he opens a window," or "it's always darkest before the dawn." Please write down the hopeful message that you can share with others and after you have, please bring them up and place them in the baskets on the corners of the altar. As you think about your own words, I'll leave you with a thought I've always found comforting....God never gives us more than we can handle.

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Reflection by Alicia Aguilar

What sustains a person through difficult situations? Is it taking charge of your life, and working on your weaknesses? Is it the hope or knowledge that things will get better as long as you believe? Or is it that trusting in God will help you through even the toughest times in your life?

Six years ago, I was in what I thought was a very minor car accident. However, it triggered a severe and rare migraine condition that I deal with to this day. For many years, I was very angry that I had this condition that no doctor could diagnose. I was angry at my doctors for not coming up with a “cure,” I was angry at my friends because they couldn’t understand the pain I was going through, and most of all, I was angry at God for “allowing this to happen to me.” I felt very alone.

One day, three years ago, I went to mass...something I hadn’t done since my college years. I don’t really know why I went, I just had the feeling that God was calling me to His home. After attending mass regularly, I met many new people. These new people, became friends who accepted me for who I was and showed me that everyone has issues in life that they must deal with. If I had a migraine episode that didn’t allow me to move, I knew I could count on my friends, the true Body of Christ, to pull together and help me. It took a while, but I finally realized why God had called me to His house. Even when I felt alone, He was always with me, acting through the kindness of others.

Through prayer, I found a way to sustain myself. As I move toward the cross, this Lenten season, I am especially reminded of what Jesus gave up for us. Knowing that I

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am a part of the Body of Christ, gives me the strength I need to not feel so alone. I feel stronger now with the knowledge that Christ is always with me, in my times of triumph, as well as the times when I struggle. When I feel the overwhelming support of my friends, I also feel the strong love of God. God didn't cause any of this to happen to me. What helps me to carry on is knowing that I am one of God's children. As I pray on my own mountain, my faith in our Father allows me to feel closer to Him,

And so I now ask you, what is a hopeful message we bring to others, even in hard times? Please write your answer on the purple paper you will find on your seats, then bring it forward and place them in the baskets at the alter.