

DISCOVERING OUR GEMS OF LOVE --THE WATER & FRANKINCENSE ARE FOR EVERYONE!

This past June, I presented a continuing education class "Spirituality in Nursing and Health Care" at the hospital where I am an RN. And the last week of July, I was one of various local "clergy people" invited to present a prayer or meditation for the dedication of our hospital's new "Care and Comfort Room" which provides a place for families to be with their loved ones who are about to make a physical transition. Although the prayers in general were somewhat faith-specific, beyond the specific words I could feel a "reaching out" to what in Sufi mysticism is known as HU-Allah, the "Beyond the Beyond" of God, represented by the sound HU, or ruach in Hebrew: the breath of God-Spirit. The common thread would be that we are all, by human nature, spiritual people, whether or not we are specifically "religious" or affiliated with a "denomination" of some sort. Spirituality is increasingly seen as a vital component of the healing process, and certainly when physical death approaches, many families and patients want the comfort of Love more than any creedal statements. Often the relatives of a patient are affiliated with numerous different denominations or religions.

But beyond the religions of creeds or dogmas is the universal religion of Love. It is the Bridge of Love between our hearts that unites us even when our ego-minds may try to divide us. "United we stand; Divided we fall" is the motto of my home state of Kentucky, a region that more than most areas, was ravaged by the divisions of the

American Civil War. The 12th Century Sufi poet Rumi wrote (from Gardens of the Beloved by Mafi and Kolin, extrapolated in prose format): "The religion of Love is a sea without a shore where lovers drown [die to selfish ego] without a sigh, without a cry." The "lovers of God" do not worry so much about any petty need to "label" God-Love or divide it.

Sometimes, working on night shift at the hospital, if a patient and their family request it (I never intrude), I'll say a non-denominational prayer, surrounding everyone with the Spirit of Universal Love, affirming that we are never alone and The Eternal Presence of Nurture and Comfort sustains us in times of grief or physical transitions. I may pray that the Angels of Mercy are surrounding everyone with Light and that the soul of the person dying is being escorted to the Eternal Throne of Grace "on angels' wings of

love." I was asked one time by a coworker if the Holy water that I sometimes place on a patient's forehead was Catholic or Episcopalian, and was I 'illegally' performing a religious ritual? Having been a Catholic for nine years, serving as a lay Charismatic Prayer Group intercessory prayer leader and a Lay Catechist, I responded that a "sacramental" such as Holy water is simply a "reminder" of God's Presence, not a ritual. I was also questioned about the Frankincense. I responded that I may place this on one's forehead or usually, I rub it on the patient's toes or feet, often accompanied in this act by family relatives of the patient. It is a sacred and meaningful moment, but not an official religious ritual. When people are seeking support and comfort, they usually respond to acts of kindness without worrying too much about denominational identity.

I've found that at three o'clock in the morning, my willingness to BE THERE for others in a gently supportive way is what really matters. Studies have shown that in times of grief, our willingness simply to BE PRESENT with those suffering or anticipating a loss is more important than our "doing" things or lots of "talking." I tell the relatives of a

dying patient that although I know that this is a sad time for them, they'll know in their hearts that they were there for their loved one when it really mattered, and that this act of caring will become a positive memory that will serve as a blessing to them down the line. I thank the relatives and friends for being present with their love, and I tell them to be sure to touch their relative and tell them that they are surrounded by loving family and friends.

I've also had several ministerial opportunities (and all of us are ministers -- Jesus was not "ordained" except by Holy Spirit!) to bless the little breathless fetal bodies who

were basically stillborn. what is medically termed "fetal demise" sometimes happens in traumatic accidents. Of course, the mother is heartbroken. One such unborn baby was about twenty-two weeks old, and had developed with beautiful little features, finely formed. Another was about nineteen weeks. The mother and close relatives had the chance to join me in a prayer as I placed a drop of Holy water on the fetal head. Some parents named their baby, and I would send forth the little body, blessed by a name and an identity, into Light and Love with heartfelt prayers for a new opportunity to experience the wonders and joys of Life in a Future yet unfolding in our midst and in our hearts.

Beyond our ruminations about religion, there is Holy Spirit Omnipresent and there is Divine Love. Everything that reminds us of the beauty and sacredness of Love and Life is important, and the "sacramentals" belong to everyone everywhere. Rumi wrote (from Gardens of the Beloved): "There is another language beyond language, another place beyond heaven and hell. Precious gems come from another mine, the heart draws light from another source." Jesus taught that "the merciful shall obtain [receive] mercy." Life gives us opportunities to give and receive "tender mercies" during our "seasons of the heart." Jesus stressed that what we do for others, especially "the least" among us, taking care of the sick, quenching others' thirst, visiting those in prison (and our new comfort room should be seen as less of a "prison" to the sick), clothing the naked and comforting the poor, these actions actually "bless God" and become the "precious gems" of the human heart, the Light from the Sacred Source that we can share with those around us.

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