

I teach *Death & Dying* as a course. I discovered something. It's all in the perception. Here's what I mean.

Immense energy resides in a loss. When a spouse dies, there are voids in the survivor where the spouse used to be. And in those voids is energy - - - blazing, explosive energy. Some of it goes to denial or anger or depression. . . especially depression. Some of it goes into the grieving process - - - three years or more. Lots of energy there. You can't cork a volcano. The energy will come out.

Here's where perception comes in. Aldo, for example, flies from Baltimore to San Francisco in a 747. He's *ter-ri-fied*. He sees the plane going down on that yellow brick road in Kansas: big boom, no parachute, fried Aldo, yellow fire, grey foam, black smoke, good-bye.

Joanna flies the same plane, same route. She's thrilled and excited. She sees high speed, great look at Earth, the Wright Brothers' brilliance, beach and boys vacation, popsicle madness. She can't wait. It's all in the perception.

Thus with loss. That tremendous energy liberated by the loss can be used to jump to a new level, a new creativeness. That's what any resurrection is all about. The seed falls off the tree and dies. A loss? Look at the new redwood tree. The energy from the loss of the seed was transformed, and quite an impressive manifestation, at that.

In human beings that energy can be directed to create. Look at Van Gogh or Gauguin. Their losses roused the muses that created *Starry Night* and *Cypresses*, *The Bathers* and *La Orana Maria*. A distraught and grieving Mozart wrote *Don Giovanni*. Out of Teilhard de Chardin's conflicts came *Le Phénomène Humain* and *Le Milieu Divin*. Susan White-Bowden lost her son, Jodi, to suicide. She has since comforted (saved[?]) countless young lives through her lectures, writings, counselling, and the strength of her "re-membering" after the loss. The caring and sustaining love shown people with AIDS by their friends, gives birth to new Samaritans and Damiens. Kalaupapa is everywhere. Degradation stirred Harriet Tubman and the others in the underground railroad. Asylum power emerged in Germany, Poland, Hungary and Scandinavia during World War II. From the ashes comes the phoenix.

There were Martha and Mary.
"Jesus, if you had been here,
our brother would not have
died." They lost their brother.

There was the street-lady. "Go
ahead," he said to the crowd.
"Cast the first stone." They
lost their fun.
And then to her, "Isn't there
anyone left? Go on your way and
don't do it anymore." She lost
her business.



Look at the transformations in
gospel losses. Christ started a
whole new way of looking at our
fellows and our God. Peter and
the fishermen got to change the
world the way no fishermen had
ever done. The upper room went
from chaos to courage . . . and
boldly into the streets. The
Emmaus walkers: "Were not our
hearts burning within us . . .?"
Mary revealed woman's partner-
ship with the GodHead. Lazarus
had great stories to tell.
Magdalene showed love beyond
the pale of learned theolo-
gians. No one will forget her
. . . nor the lepers, nor the
beggars, either. Their losses
made them famous for us.



And there was Jesus. "Popule
meus. Quid feci tibi . . . My
people, what have I done that
you should treat me like this?"
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how
often would I have taken you
under my wing as a hen her
chicks." No prophet is accepted
in his own town.
Did he waste a life?

To John: "I'm finished. Take
care of my mother." He lost his
best friend.

They were all locked in the
Upper Room for fear of the
elders. Three years chasing
clouds.

At the tomb: "Mary, don't touch
me." She lost her dream.



" Sperabamus. We were hoping. . . " Remember those travellers on the way to Emmaus? They were hoping this latest fellow was going to bring the millennium. He looked so good. He said something about his father. He couldn't have meant G-d, but he looked ok. Had good things to say. People liked him. But now he's dead.

There was his mother. Her own soul a sword shall pierce. "Son, where were you? Your father and I were all over looking for you." They lost him, too.

There was the rich young man. He went away sad, for his possessions were many. He lost his dream.

There was Cana. "Son, they have no wine." "So . . . What's that to you and me?" He lost his private life.

There was Peter and the fishermen. "We gave up our jobs to follow him." Unemployed.

There was the woman at the well. "Where is your husband?" "I have no husband." She had many husbands. . . and this thirsty stranger knew it all. She lost her games.

We all lose a lot. It's part of life. Nothing lasts forever. We lose our jobs, our spouses, our parents, our children, our friends, our money, our homes, our life dreams, and our lives. Every loss produces energy, and transforming that energy can give us new ways of being that we never dreamed of before. We're freed to see it. We need to see it. If loss is perceived as a bridge instead of a barricade, a door instead of a detour, there are no limits. We live again and new.

None of this is easy. Losses hurt and for so long. But we can do it. We can become new and amazed *creators*, and isn't that what we're all about?

Blessings and prayers from all of us here at St. Francis.

Fr. Tom
Dahlia

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