

A Month to Pray, Respect And Remember Loved Ones

▲ by Laura Kelly Fanucci

What surprised me most was not that she had carried her grief quietly for half a century.

Not that she could tell me exactly how old her babies would be today. Not that her bright eyes brimmed with tears as she shared her story with a stranger.

What shocked me was that after we finished talking, I looked up to find another woman waiting to speak to me about her own losses. Then another behind her. And another. And another.

After speaking and writing publicly about infertility, miscarriage and infant loss, I have gotten used to the fact – indeed, the grace – that whenever one shares a story, others come forward to tell their own.

But I still carry the memory of that first night, in a parish not far from mine, where woman after woman waited to share their same silent sorrow.

Each one taught me how the heaviest

stories are made lighter when we carry them together. We sat and talked for nearly an hour. Nothing was fixed by our conversation or tears, but we left lighter.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ,” wrote St. Paul (Gal 6:2).

“Serve with simplest acts of love: respect, pray and remember to be the church that reaches out with mercy, honors each life lost and continues to care for the bereaved.”

The same exhortation holds true for us today, especially this month. As Catholics, our call to family life – within our own families and the wider body of Christ – commands us to carry out these works of mercy. To comfort the sorrowful. To pray for the living and the dead.

October is Respect Life Month. It’s also Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month and the month of the rosary.

Take Up Our Call

A perfect time to take up our call to pray for those who are grieving the loss of life at its very beginning.

Even those at the end of their earthly life, the wise ones who have learned much from their length of days, still carry the weight of this grief. Their stories, buried for decades, are wounds that can burst open with unexpected emotion.

Generations past often endured the added burdens of secrecy and shame. Doctors who whisked away their babies before they could hold them. Spouses

who never spoke of the stillbirth. Relatives who told them to forget about the miscarriage, move on and try again.

“At least now people are talking about it,” they tell me, dabbing at eyes welled with fresh sorrow. “No one helped me. No one cared.”

Facing the pain of the bereaved is daunting for all of us. Even after writing a book on miscarriage for Catholic couples, I still hesitate each time I pen a sympathy card or wait in line after a funeral. What can I possibly say?

But October reminds me to serve with the simplest acts of love: respect, pray and remember. To be the church that reaches out with mercy, honors each life lost and continues to care for the bereaved.

When people ask me what to say to someone in their life who has lost a child, I offer four simple phrases, the four I fall back on every time. They are: “I’m so sorry. I love you. I’m here for you. You and your child will not be forgotten.”

Grow Greater Compassion

This is how we grow into greater compassion for those who mourn. Respect the depth of their grief, pray for their healing and remember their pain over time.

“I have thought about my babies every day since,” the last woman in line told me that night.

Bent over a walker, she leaned forward with a shaky whisper. “Every day since.”

I cannot forget her words. I hope you will remember, too.

Fanucci is a syndicated columnist for Catholic News Service.

Does life seem to be moving faster every day?



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