

PSALMS CAN BE A LIFE LINE TO THE BELOVED

Three years ago, the love of my life died of cancer. Mary and I had spent half a life time working together in hospice and creating various forms of spiritual education programs at the Sacred Art of Living Center. Our marriage was unique... as our life, love and ministry became an inseparable dance. I cannot say it any gentler... Mary's death has been a devastating loss. I have only recently begun to write about the disorientation that her death caused me. But there have been a couple of dim lights in the darkness. One of them is related to a spiritual practice that bookends every day of my life now. The practice is based on praying with the psalms. In my Catholic-Celtic spiritual Tradition, praying the psalms is an essential daily ingredient. There is an ancient tradition that invites an anamcara, or soul friend, to pray Psalm 119 [the longest by far of the Psalter] faithfully and every day for your beloved. There is a sense in this psalm of being 'on the journey' with the one who has died: 'Blessed are those on the way...' the prayer begins.

But had it not been for a unique translation of the psalms, I am not sure that I would have been attracted to adopt this practice for Mary. Nan Merrill's translation, Psalms for Praying, opened up these ancient prayers in a creative, contemporary way for me. For one thing, Nan substitutes all language for God, Lord, etc. with the word, 'Beloved.' This small 'tweak' in translation made all the difference for me. When I pray the psalms now, they help give voice to my yearning for the great Beloved in communion and inseparably with my beloved anamcara, Mary. After the first year, I adapted the practice by continuing to prayer one psalm each day, and journaling about its meaning. I do this each morning and find that the message often gives me direction for the challenges of the coming day. In the evening, I still return to Psalm 119 but not pray just one verse each day, parsing and savoring the meaning of what it means to 'be on the journey' now and find renewed relationship with my Beloveds. I suspect this may be a practice for the rest of my life and am grateful that David's ancient songs continue to find resonance in my own heart and life.

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