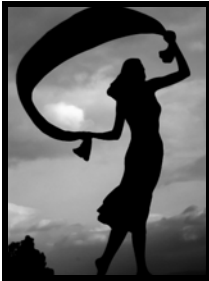


Letter of Thanks from a Grief to Grace Retreatant August, 2005



As I pick up my pen and paper to write this letter of thanks, my eyes well with tears and my heart swells with gratitude for the gift of healing that the Lord gave to me as a result of attending the "From Grief to Grace" retreat.

The retreat was a peaceful and nurturing cocoon for me and the other 15 retreatants as we followed the lead of Dr. Theresa Burke through the weekend retreat, "From Grief to Grace". What an incredible experience it was to have Dr. Burke presenting this retreat for the first time, using similar principles from the Rachel's Vineyard retreats to now aid in healing the deep wounds of childhood and adolescent mental, physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse.

I want to share with you the graces that I received and the depth of healing that occurred in my life in those three days of retreat. I grew up in a home that looked quite "normal" on the outside, but due to my father's anger, rages, and abuse, my family suffered much on the inside. Throughout my childhood and most of my adult years, I lived in denial about what had happened in my family of origin. I was unable and unwilling to confront the abuse that my mother, my siblings, and I had endured. I wore 'rose colored glasses', so to speak.

Upon the death of my father nearly a decade ago, the 'glasses' came off. For the first time in my life, I admitted and felt the pain that been inflicted upon my family by my father over many, many years. I was overwhelmed by the realization of how much I and each member of my family had suffered, and the life-long consequences that had resulted. I was filled with anger, bitterness, and resentment towards my father. I felt hatred and was unable to see any good in him or anything that he had done in his life. I felt total unforgiveness towards him, and found myself frequently asking the question, "How can a man who is supposed to love and care for his wife and children hurt them so much?!?" There were no answers...

I went to an excellent counselor and did 'family of origin' work, which helped me come out of the denial that I had held on to for so many years. I confided in a priest, and frequented the Sacraments, including the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I found myself confessing the feelings of anger, bitterness, hatred, and unforgiveness each time. And each time, the Lord was giving me the courage and strength to delve a bit deeper into my family history, and to see the truth about my family more clearly. But I felt stuck...stuck in unforgiveness...questioning what kind of a Christian I was to harbor such bitterness...

When I first heard about this retreat, I had no intention of attending. Interestingly, I could not see that the topic would even apply to me. But two weeks prior to the retreat, I awakened suddenly in the middle of the night and heard the Lord speak to my heart..."I want you to attend the retreat as a retreatant!"

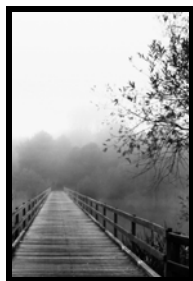
On the first evening of the retreat, the tears began to flow as each retreat said the words, "I hurt..." As the retreat progressed, hearts were touched as Theresa Burke and the retreat team members read the Living Scriptures and led the guided meditations. Souls were anointed when each of us were blessed with holy oil and prayed over us, and when we celebrated the Holy Mass each day. We journeyed together with Jesus and each other through each of the Sorrowful Mysteries—the Agony in the Garden, the Scourging at the Pillar, the Crowning with Thorns, the Carrying of the Cross, and the Crucifixion—bringing our own lives, our own wounds, our own sorrow, sadness, and pain into each of the Living Scripture meditations. We heard the voice of Jesus say to His abusers, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

It was hard...so hard...so many tears...so much pain. But the Lord with His precious love for each of us was with us moment by moment. He desired our healing.

By Sunday, we were ready for the Living Scriptures and guided meditation on the Resurrection...ready to lay down the heavy loads we had carried for years and Years, even decades and to be resurrected. This day was a great turning point for me. I will never forget during the morning break when I heard the voice of Jesus speak to my heart, "I want you to put flowers on your father's grave". I gasped and burst into tears. In my bitterness and unforgiveness, I had not attended my father's burial, nor had I been to his grave. I could not even recall the exact date of his death. But I knew that the Lord had begun a great healing in my soul, for when the retreat was over on Sunday afternoon, I bid everyone farewell, got in my vehicle with the flowers from the dining room table that I had just received, and drove to the cemetery where my father was buried.

I slowly walked to his grave, knelt by his tombstone, and so gently laid the beautiful pink roses from the retreat on the stone. With tears in my eyes, I traced each letter of his last name with my finger... his name that was my maiden name. I touched each letter of his first name...truly sensing who this man was, seeing him as a person created by God. I touched the date of his birth engraved on the tombstone...he, too, was born a child of God. I touched each letter and number on the date of his death and now I knew the exact date of his death...and the Lord showed me that from that date my father had been in His safekeeping.

The sky was so blue and the air so still as I sat on the ground by my father's grave, feeling God's healing touch move through my body, mind, and soul. A gentle breeze brushed across my face...the presence of the Holy Spirit was so real. A feeling of peace, and yes, even joy filled me as I wept and prayed, "Father, forgive him, for he did not know what he was doing."



I give thanks to God for this great healing in my life. And I give thanks to the entire retreat team for making this anointed retreat possible. May God bless you and watch over you and the holy angels protect you!

In Christ's love,
A Healed Daughter