



Although this is a somber time as we come together to remember those we loved who have died over the past year, I am going to begin my reflections with two slightly irreverent stories, one that is true and one that is made up. I am sure in your pain and grief, there have been at least a few smiles and even a bit of laughter as you held your deceased love one in your heart.

The joke goes like this. A teacher of the first grade catechism class asks the children the question: where is God. As is the wont of children, all raise their hands begging to be called upon. The first little boy says *God is in heaven*, and the teacher commends him for this answer. A little girl enthusiastically says *God is our hearts*, and again the teacher offers praise. A third little girl says that *God is in the Holy Communion at Mass*, and the teacher says well done. Finally, a little boy says *God is our family bathroom*. Naturally, the teacher is a bit perplexed and asks the boy why he thinks God is in the bathroom. He says, well, I have four sisters and every morning my father stands at the bathroom doors, and says, *God Almighty, get out of that bathroom*.

The second story is a true one that I heard from another priest. A mother and daughter ask a priest to come to the cemetery to bless the grave of their husband and father. It has snowed and there is about four inches of snow on the ground and it is a very large cemetery so it is hard to find the grave as they go up and

down the rows. Finally, the wife in exasperation cries out, *where the heck are you Harry?*

Each of the two stories raises two profound theological and spiritual questions that interconnect. *Where is Harry*, and *where is God*. You might have asked the questions where are you God when your husband, wife, your friend was dying. Why did we have to lose them at this time of our lives? Why do we have to die? These are serious difficult questions with no simple answers. The only truth that makes sense to me is that God if God is on a cross dying on a Friday in Jerusalem, and He is, He is with every dying and suffering person in the world. That is what it means to say that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. He was right there in that hospice, the hospital, and your bedroom when you tearfully let go of your beloved.

That brings us to where is Harry/Harriet? I think our response would be that we hope he/or she is in Heaven. We might even point our finger and say he/she is up there. That is our hope and our prayer. But, even if he or she is in heaven, we so happy that they are, but we so wish that he or she was still here with us. *I miss him, I miss her so much. I miss them on their birthdays, I miss them on our anniversaries, at Thanksgiving at Christmas, and I miss them next to me in bed, at the kitchen table, on the phone. There is not a day that goes by that I do think about them and mourn them.* Well, that is part of my response to where is Harry. They deceased we mourn are as present to us as we think about them and carry them with us. They are with us in the thousands of memories we carry and experience them off when we least expect them to come. It may sound strange to say, but we feel them so much in their absence. We see them in the faces of our children, and our grandchildren. That very longing, the profound bond that we shared with them for many years is perhaps even more alive now than ever.

We may lovingly visit the cemetery or view their ashes and say they are there. This is a powerful reminder of their presence, but they are not there in the way we wish them to be. I often preach at funerals on the Gospel of the women coming to the tomb to anoint Jesus' broken body. Because of the Jewish Sabbath, Jesus burial was rushed and his dear friends want to anoint his body with oils and

perfumes. When they go into the tomb, an angel says to them, *why do you look for the living among the dead. He is he is not here. He has risen.*

That is the core of our faith: He is risen. I believe all those who have died are alive with the Living God. Their spirits, their souls, that which made them who they were when they walked among us, their memories, their loves, their feelings, their personalities, the dreams and hopes are with them now with God.

I suppose the little boy was correct that God was in the bathroom since we believe God is present everywhere. He is not on some distant planet looking down at us, but truly with us. Here is how St. Paul describes it: *God intended that they would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being.* Where are our deceased, they are with God. Where is God? He is with us.

At this Mass, at every Mass, we believe that God is truly present in the Holy Eucharist: the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As we celebrate this Mass, I truly believe I know where your beloved deceased are: they are right here with God and with us, present here in the Eucharist.