

# Grace Notes in Miniature

Tuesday June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020

Dear friends,

Today I signed on to a symposium on Grief and one of the points which really resonated with me was that only about ten per cent of people actually need therapeutic intervention to help them deal with grief; the majority are well-served by support from their familiar community. Part of the conversation was about the grief many of us are feeling at being at arm's length from our communities, and it caused me to think again how important community is to us in our worldview. Our Christian consciousness is certainly rooted in an understanding that we are not alone, that we exist as part of our community. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-3BO\\_PQbqY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-3BO_PQbqY) That is one of the reasons why baptism and the other sacraments of initiation are not ideally celebrated in private groups but in the presence of the worshipping community to which we belong. I



remember an irate godmother once telling me how dreadful it was that her godchild had to be baptised at Mass, rather than in a private ceremony with just the family; it seemed to me that the point of the pre-baptismal catechesis had gone right over her head as we discussed that baptism was an acceptance of a relationship not only with God but with the Body of Christ, the

Christian Community. In many places, the minister of baptism makes a point of asking the community if they are ready to help the parents to bring their children up in the ways of the faith. In the same way, when adults are presented for the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) the community will sing at the Rite of Entrance into the Order of Catechumens, "We stand with you, we pray for you, O holy child of God." It is always meant to be understood that one is thus becoming part of a family of many, many brothers and sisters.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOuzqECYdFA> On one occasion I was called to go to the hospital to baptise a very sick newborn who was going to undergo a very serious surgery the next day; her parents felt that having her baptised would give them all strength for the ordeal which was to follow. A few months later, when she was strong enough to be brought to the church, the priest welcomed her and her parents at the door for a Rite of Welcome and completed the Baptismal Rite in the presence of the community who had been praying for her. It was incredibly meaningful and moving. The next few years had many ups and downs as she faced health crisis after crisis. On one occasion when she was a toddler, my fourteen-year-old son and I performed mouth-to-mouth to keep her breathing until she got to the hospital however, today she is a young married woman thoroughly enjoying life. And I recall another young member of our parish community who suffered from painful muscle contractures as a result of cerebral palsy; the four people needed each day to help her mother with the stretching exercises required to keep her from seizing up were mostly volunteers from the parish.



All of this is to help me to remember – and, perhaps to remind you, that we are never alone; apart from being in the thoughts and prayers of people to whom we can reach out, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gpoJNv5dlQ>, God promises us over and over, in the words of the prophets – do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. (Isaiah 41:10) and of Jesus – behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”(Matthew 28:20) that we are never alone. And St Teresa of Avila reminds us: God has no other hands but yours to do his work....

Just for the pleasure of listening, I am including this version of Leonard Cohen’s Hallelujah, recorded by a virtual choir of which many of the choristers are front-line workers. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIDim9aYWds>

And finally: sometimes when I am down, I sing to lift my spirits, and have been known to do this in my car late at night all alone. I tend to sing hymns because those are usually the songs to which I know most of the words; this is one of my favourites: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDmaZBX1Tew>

With every blessing, Gillian