

The Paschal Mystery Lived: From Dying to a New Rising



Spring blossoms fill the air with fragrance so sweet and lush greenery erases what seemingly was, just yesterday, a crisscross of trunk, limb, bare tangled vine and naked stem. Children play late into the evening. The line at the last Fish Fry was no longer just a muddle of shadows in the dark but faces known and new, reflecting the glow of an untired sun. Winter's last vestiges have disappeared and newness is all around even before we approach Holy Week.

Cycles, seasons, so much a part of life! Our own lives are characterized by similar cycles of dying, waiting and rising. Stephen Ministry operates on the principal that all of this is held in God's hands. All we do is learn and practice how to listen, empathize, pray, speak hope, hold someone's hand or stay with them - especially through the dying and the waiting. It is the Lord himself who gives new life. In many ways, this is a cycle that our Stephen Ministers-to-be are going through right now, as they train for their mission. Showing their dedication to continuous learning, they have, so far, been through about half of the 50 hours of training required. Their commitment requires patience, courage, humility and an eagerness for mission. There are ways of doing things, of thinking, expressing, even feeling, on which must be grafted the new ways they are learning.

And that learning itself is a cycle – as with all of us. Times in our lives, our receptivity is non-existent as we remain dead to growth. Then comes the period of waiting, when the seeds are sown for receptivity to new paradigms, new levels of acceptance, seeking and understanding - perhaps even new dreams or hopes. The first among those who will one day seek care through this ministry, may be in this phase right now. And even as this is written, there is much going on for them. Much preparing, planning, caring and lifting it all up to God. The seeds are being sown quietly and gently, with blessings from above. Our Stephen Leader Team joyously continues this work we are privileged to volunteer for.

There is truth in the quote 'When our memories far outweigh our dreams, we have grown old'. So even the cycles must end sometime with aging and death must they not? Not so for us Christians because in the supreme dying to a new rising, our Lord Jesus manifested to us the eternal covenant of love – that we have a claim to eternal life, a place in the Father's mansion, a blessed union with the Trinity. It is with that hope, that faith, that Stephen Ministry operates as a labor of love and caring. In the manner of Julian of Norwich, we want to bring to all, our truest understanding of her words, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'

There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. Eccl. 3:1,4