

For Love Is Stronger than Death

This prayer service reflects on death and loss in light of Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection and God's enduring love.

(20 minutes)

Before the session, instruct all the participants (including the facilitator) to bring a personal symbol to the session. This symbol should be an object that acts as a reminder of a much loved person now separate from the participant—by death, illness, geographic distance, or the breakdown of a relationship. You will also need a Bible, reflective music, a crucifix, a candle, and a white cloth. Mark the following Bible passages, which will be read during this prayer service. Place the candle and the crucifix in the center of the prayer space.

- "'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'" (Matt. 11:28, NRSV).
- "Trust in God, and he will help you; / make straight your ways and hope in him" (Sir. 2:6, NABRE).
- "Let the bones that you have crushed rejoice" (Ps. 51:8, NRSV).
- "[The Lord God] will destroy death forever" (Isa. 25:8, NABRE).
- "'Today you will be with me in Paradise'" (Luke 23:43, NABRE).
- "'Anyone who eats this bread will live forever, and I will raise him up on the last day'" (adapted from John 6:51).
- "'I am the resurrection and the life'" (John 11:25, NABRE).



saint mary's press
touching hearts. enlivening minds.



1. Invite the young people to gather in the prepared prayer space and to place their symbol near the candle and crucifix. Light the candle. Begin with a few simple relaxation or breathing exercises and some prayerful background music.

2. Pray aloud, using these or similar words:

Merciful God, it takes so much faith and so much courage to touch death and remain hopeful. When we feel hurt and loss, it's hard to imagine that there could be a Heaven. It's hard to believe that broken relationships can be mended in this life—let alone perfected in the next. It's hard to imagine that we could be so completely loved that we would hunger for nothing more. Help us, dearest God, at this point in our journey. Help us to face the emptiness of the tomb with unfailing trust and hope in your wisdom and love.

Gently invite the young people to allow themselves to feel their own emptiness, the places in their life where love has not come. Pause in silence.

3. Invite a volunteer to read the reflection on the handout, ["For Love Is Stronger than Death,"](#) which is based on Luke 24:1-9. Give the volunteer reader part A, and take part B for yourself.
4. Instruct the young people to come forward to retrieve their personal symbol. Tell them that as they do so, they might ask God to bring hope into the silence of their heart. Play reflective music as they come forward.
5. When everyone has rejoined the circle, turn off the music and lead the group in reading the Bible passages that you marked before the session began. Read aloud the first passage yourself, inviting all to respond together, "We remember your words." Pass the Bible to the person next to you, directing them to read aloud the next passage. Lead the group in the response, "We remember your words." Continue in this way until all the passages have been read aloud.
6. Reading aloud the following words, or similar words of your own, lead the young people to pray with their symbols:

Hold your symbol in your dominant hand—in your right hand if you are right-handed, in your left hand if you are left-handed. For a moment, feel the strength of your dominant hand. Recall God's strength and God's promise. Imagine God's grace and love flowing into the situation marked by your symbol. [Pause.]

Now place your weaker hand around your stronger hand as it holds the symbol. For a moment, get in touch with your own weakness—your fears, your hurts, your wounds, your limits. [Pause.]

Allow your weaker hand to feel the strength of your dominant hand. Allow your weakness to feel itself being supported and held up by God's strength and love. [Pause.]

Keep holding your symbol in your two hands and listen quietly for God speaking to you.

7. After about a minute, read aloud the following prayer from the Catholic funeral rite:



God of all consolation, you pursue us with untiring love and dispel the shadow of death with the bright dawn of life. . . . Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, by dying has destroyed our death, and by rising, restored our life. Enable us therefore to press on toward him, so that, after our earthly course is run, he may reunite us with those we love, when every tear will be wiped away. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. [*Order of Christian Funerals*, p. 349]

8. Remind the young people that in Baptism we are dressed in a white garment, a sign of new life and new hope. In Baptism we are joined with Christ both in life and in death. In death Jesus was wrapped in a new linen cloth. Solemnly and silently cover the crucifix with the white cloth. Say that Jesus went to his death in faith and hope. Explain that we are asked to do the same.

Tell the young people that they will be asked to come forward to place their personal symbol with the crucifix, beneath the cloth. Explain that this is a gesture of willingness to trustingly follow Jesus into the grave. Pause. Then place your own symbol under the white cloth, inviting the young people to do the same. Wait until all have had an opportunity to come forward. Close with a moment of silent prayer. Then ask the young people to move out of the prayer space.

Acknowledgments

(This prayer service is adapted from [*Death, Grief, and Christian Hope*](#), a minicourse in the [*Horizons Program series*](#), by Nancy Marrocco [Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1997], pages 13, 42–43. Copyright © 1997 by Saint Mary's Press. Permission is granted for this prayer service to be used for classroom or campus ministry purposes. This prayer service may not be republished in any form without written permission from Saint Mary's Press. To order this book, contact Saint Mary's Press at 800-533-8095, or [order online](#).)

Published March 20, 2004.

