

# Faith, hope and love in the experience of the dying

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# Lessons taught by dying people

- Life is precious
- The imminence of death is a powerful force
- Priorities change
- Fear of the unknown may be oppressive
- People need people
- Faith matters

# What happens when people die?

Physical dimension:

Body

Psychosocial and spiritual dimension:

Heart

Mind

Spirit

Soul

(Borasio, G.D., Über das Sterben, München, 2013)

# Body – physical processes

Distressing symptoms causing fear and pain

First priority

Immediate and lasting medical attention

Security

Confusion of symptoms:

physical, emotional, mental and spiritual pain

look alike

# Heart – emotional, social and spiritual processes

Who is there?

- People I trust and love
- People I am in some conflict with
- Relevant people in my past
- People I need here and now

Inevitable challenges:

- Saying good-bye
- Mourning – Coping with grief - Meaning
- Making peace with others, with myself, with God

# Mind and Spirit – mental processes: existential and spiritual questions

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from?
- Where do I go to?
- What is the meaning of my life?

# Emotional, existential and spiritual processes

Searching for answers on an existential level is spiritual and emotional

- What was the joy of my life?
- What broke my spirit?
- Where did I succeed?
- Where did I fail?
- What is left unfinished?
- Who received my love?

# Psychosocial and Spiritual Pain

- Existential questions
- Unfinished business
- Grief
- Hurtful relationships
- The experience and conviction of not being loved, respected and cared for
- Loneliness
- Hopelessness
- Despair
- A state of peacelessness



# Faith at the end of life

As a chaplain I hear from many patients that they are not religious, not connected with a church or faith community or not very spiritual. Family members, friends, doctors and nurses often confirm this and state that there is no need for Pastoral or Spiritual Care – meaning there is no need for a chaplain

- I used to believe them, but discovered that people have more faith than they say or know and many tell me they would like to be able to have faith

# Faith is personal

The majority of people seldom speak about faith.

There is a lack of language to describe faith and faith issues

- Faith has roots
- Faith develops
- Faith transcends

# Faith is hidden

## **Facts, Part I:**

- When asked at the time of entry to a hospital or when asked during their stay by a health professional, people often say they do not want or need a chaplain
- Most people never call for a chaplain

## **Facts, Part II:**

- When I enter a room at the hospital as a chaplain or visit people at home as a pastor, and offer support through a talk, a prayer or a blessing, 90% accept it and are glad I came. (Several studies have confirmed this fact)

# Faith is specific

Faith is connected with what we have learned, heard, experienced and practiced

- By our family, church, school, Spiritual readings
- By our experiences alone and in community
- By our prayers, songs and other expressions of faith

# Hope has many faces

## I Hope in the here and now

Hope may be expressed by professionals, friends and family in regard to a concrete situation

## II Hope beyond this life

Hope may include a religious and spiritual dimension in terms of hope in life after death, i.e. eternal life, resurrection, peace.

Hope is a source of strength and courage

# Hope as a Religious and Spiritual Ressource

Coping with fear through hope in faith:

- Dying people often ask:
- Is there a God?
- Is there eternal life?
- Is there forgiveness and grace?
- Is there judgement?
- How will it be?

# Love – An encompassing spiritual connection

There is more love than meets the eye

- Love heals – through forgiveness, respect and acceptance
- Love endures – it lives on where it was given
- Love prevails – it is a strength that lasts

God is love – in love we connect with God