**A Dad Mourns in Ordinary Time**

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By Lucia A. Silecchia

He was in his mid-eighties, the age at which conversations about the things that really matter seemed to flow more easily.

Over hot strong coffee in a crowded diner, we spoke of life, its highs and lows, and the unexpected twists and turns through which each life wanders. The conversation turned to discussion of hard times and, unprompted, he told me of the “worst day” of his life.

I expected he would speak of personal illness, or the recent deaths of his loved ones, or the challenges of supporting a family in an ever-changing world. Instead, though, he told me that the day he remembered with such acute sadness was the day that he and his wife lost a child in a miscarriage.

I did not press him for details about how many months old the child had been nor whether he knew if it was a son or a daughter. All I knew was that, over four decades later, his heart held a special place for this child he never met, this child whose hand he never held, this child who never grew into the adult he thought he would know.

In retrospect, I suppose that I should not have been surprised. This was a man who, with his whole heart, believed what the Church teaches about life starting at conception. This was a man who, with his whole heart, loved the children he already had. Why wouldn’t he, why shouldn’t he, mourn for a child who was a unique, unrepeatable human person whose existence had been an answer to his prayers, and whose loss left a hole in his heart.

The loss of children in miscarriages is heartbreakingly common. Yet, it is an oft-hidden loss. Women who have suffered a miscarriage may have a short medical leave from work, and their pain may be known to a small circle of their nearest and dearest. However, the depth of that loss – the loss of a child, of a member of the family, and of a joyful hope – is rarely acknowledged for the heartbreak that it is.

This is slowly changing, and more is now said about the impact of such loss on mothers.

However, with respect to fathers, this is not yet the case. Nevertheless, fathers mourn too. A father grieves both the loss of his child and the helplessness that comes from watching the deep suffering of the child’s mother, a woman beloved by him.

As Father’s Day comes, many dads will be celebrated by their children who will offer gifts, share favorite foods, and rejoice in their lives shared together. At Masses that Sunday, many services will end with fathers invited to stand to receive a special blessing and expression of gratitude. All of this is good, as the importance and vital role of good fathers seems so often underappreciated.

But in these celebrations, please spare a prayer for those men who never knew their child or children -- and for whom this day holds a measure of sorrow. They are fathers too. For a brief time, their child lived hidden away. They so often have no photos or names of the child they lost in miscarriage. Their only memories may be the joy of the day they learned of the pregnancy, and the day they learned their child was lost.

On Father’s Day, please pray for those who grieve. If men near and dear to you have suffered this loss, offer the support they may need, knowing that it is in short supply these days.

And please remember in your prayers a man of joy who still kept a sorrow hidden in his heart for more than four decades. He has since left this life. My prayer for him is that, in mysterious ways God alone may fathom, he may know the unknown child he loved and lost – and quietly mourned in ordinary time.

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