

## The Other Side of the Line

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How many times over the years have I stood in line at the funeral home, waiting my turn to express condolences to a grieving family. As the line slowly snaked along, I wondered what was going through the minds of those who had lost loved ones ... hurting, confused, burdened with a load of sorrow yet bravely facing those who had come to comfort them.

Now I know.

I had suffered loss before. My father died 36 years ago, but time had soothed the painful memories of that ten year old boy. Now I had to face the death of my sister from the other side of the line.

In doing so I learned that Rom 12:15 – *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”* – is less a command and more the natural reaction of those who truly love one another. It is a desire born of tenderness and empathy to reach out and support the suffering. When you’re on the other side of the line, you don’t need some philosophical exposition of death; rather, you need a genuine expression of care from those who truly feel your pain.

I learned that the empathy shared by the spiritual family is a bonding emotion: *“And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it”* (1 Cor 12:26). When we only know each other from afar, when we share mere pleasantries on occasion, we may have friendship or cordial fraternity (or, on the contrary, such superficiality may be fertile ground for apathy or hostility toward one another). But when grief or tragedy or overwhelming joy is shared, pettiness is set aside and we find our hearts fervently mingling in heartfelt fellowship. This is where we truly become acquainted with our brethren, and where we reach out in ways that deepens our mutual love.

I also learned that the joy of being comforted creates a strong desire to be a comforter to others:

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God ...”* (2 Cor 1:3-4).

When our grief and dread are calmed by the grace of God and the compassion of those who love us, we desire to share this consolation with the anxious or suffering. We want to say, “Yes, I *know* the agony of soul you feel, but I also know the great peace and strength that God will give to you throughout this trial.” Truly, in our darkest hours, He provides us with everything we need to maintain our faith and choose what is right.

I also learned that while there is great comfort when those of like nature weep with us, there is even more consolation in knowing that *“Jesus wept”* when He beheld the wrenching grief of Lazarus’ family and friends (Jn 11:33-36). To be able to approach God in the midst of such sorrow and *know* that He has felt what we feel is the most soul-affirming comfort imaginable.

*We share our mutual woes,  
our mutual burdens bear.  
And often for each other flows  
the sympathizing tear.*