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Miscarriage

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When we learned that one of the teachers at Oscar's school had a miscarriage I was reminded of our own experience with that kind of loss.

We already had Oscar when we started graduate school. As we began our third and final year, we were aware of wanting Oscar (already 3) to have siblings closer in age to him and thought we could make it work to spend that last year of school pregnant. We were thrilled when we found out in September that we were expecting.

It was only my second pregnancy (Oscar being the first) and I was happily surprised at how easily it was going. I didn't have any of the morning sickness or other physical inconveniences I had had when expecting Oscar. At the time, I chalked it up to my body being used to pregnancy and knowing what to do and how to handle the changes going on.

Then on November 14th, the night of the Notre Dame/Boston College game, I started to feel funny. Without going into detail, it was obvious late in the evening that something was not right with my body. Calls to the midwives (they were a complete God-send) helped us prepare for any contingencies that might come up that night if in fact I was going to miscarry. And, unfortunately, a little before midnight that is exactly what happened.

It was devastating.

What else can you say about all the joy, hope and anticipation that is lost along with that tiny life? My memories of those moments involve lots of tearful prayer, the bathroom floor, and cold.

It was devastating.

I wanted to write about it because it happens so much more frequently than I ever thought possible and it is important for parents not to feel alone during those times.

Miscarriages are not that uncommon. I mean, I knew my mother had had a miscarriage and I knew Josh's aunt had as well. But those seemed isolated and so long ago. Additionally, going through our first pregnancy, reading all those books on pregnancy and during all our preparations we just didn't hear much about miscarriage. Then, when it happened to us, women kind of came out of the woodwork to support me. I would get a call or a note of encouragement letting me know Josh and I weren't alone.

One of the most helpful messages at that time came from an administrative assistant in the office on campus where I worked. We didn't have a very close relationship at all. I often wondered if she even liked me. But the day after it happened I got an email from her. Just three lines, "I am sorry for your loss. I have had three miscarriages. This doesn't mean that you won't have more children in the future."

It was amazing (and another God-send), how she named part of my deepest pain and fear: that we might not have any more children. I really didn't even know that was going on inside me, but when I read her words naming that fear, I felt a palpable relief.

There were other moments of intense grace during that time of mourning for Joshua and me. One was when we visited the midwife for an examination following the miscarriage. In some of the paperwork they gave us was a small little brochure on mourning the loss of a child. There was one brief paragraph on how mourning a child can drive parents apart. How awful! What could be worse than to lose your baby and then your spouse as well?

The brochure mentioned that it is often because the spouses don't spend time communicating about how they are feeling and when and if they grieve differently, it drives them apart. Then and there, Joshua and I decided to have a "check-in" every night about how the day went for each of us and how we were doing with the loss of "baby" (all we could think to call our departed little one). Those kitchen table meetings each night were HUGELY helpful in keeping us connected as we dealt with both separate and shared feelings. In many ways our relationship got stronger.

The other two moments of grace were moments of prayer. One day during the miscarriage (incredibly and so sadly, the process can drag on), I was trying desperately to pray and seemingly to no avail. I could NOT find the words to talk to God or to ask for what I needed. Then I started praying Our Fathers and Psalms. Those were the right words.

Then again a day later when we decided to bury the remains of baby we looked to our Rites book. (Standard issue for a third year Masters of Divinity student.) We used some of the prayers from the rite of burial of a child (it almost hurts to type those words... "burial of a child." Gosh what could be more sad?). But that rite also had the right words.

Our Tradition is SO rich and SO strong that we even have words to express the inexpressible, unimaginable grief of losing a child. I have never been so grateful as I was in those few days to know prayers by rote. When my words failed me, there were words that came to me. When I couldn't dream of how to say goodbye to a child I hadn't even met, there were words expressing that sentiment in the Rite of Burial. I have never been so grateful to be Catholic.