



REFLECTION

Entering into the Chaos

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Mercy is the willingness to enter into the chaos of others.
— James Keenan, SJ

My beloved friend Brian — a poet, art collector, activist and caretaker of animals — enjoyed a rich spirituality and a wickedly funny sense of humor. He also lived with bipolar disorder, a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings. With the help of friends, family and a team of professionals, Brian worked hard at maintaining mental health, but at times things fell apart and he needed extra support as he resumed a familiar journey of behavior modification and medication adjustments.

Through his highs and the lows, I sought to be a good friend to Brian, sharing in his delights as well as stepping into his particular experience of chaos, when needed at times. Likewise, through the years, when the struggles of my own life seemed overwhelming, it is Brian who stepped into the fray for me. It is Brian who read poetry to me, who made me tea, who took me out for a well-timed breakfast, who knew the questions

to ask and the silence to keep. Brian entered into my particular challenges and experience of chaos time and again, showing me the mercy of God that I needed.

GOING THERE

Maybe you have a friend like Brian in your life — one who knows from hard-won experience how to be with you in your own messiness or hard times,



how to ask the right questions, how to help you reset your pace, or how to hold silence as you find the words you need to speak. Maybe you have a friend who, having risen from struggle, knows when to reveal battle scars and healed wounds, to assure you that there is more to this suffering than may meet the eye.

Or maybe you are the friend who knows how to enter the fray, and who can be that presence of mercy for others. Maybe your own journey has expanded your perspective, so that you know how to be a good companion. Perhaps your choice to engage with your own chaos — to take a merciful dive into your own challenging history, your genetic disposition or your addictions — is the greatest gift you can give.

Reflect today on where the chaos in the lives of those around you may invite your presence. Make a commitment to enter in with mercy, whether through a loving conversation, a shared meal or a listening ear. You can expect that the experience may be messy, awkward and perhaps even a little frightening. But as you willingly face the chaos experienced by another, you can do so with a spirit of trust and expectancy. You can look for the potential, the beauty and the creative, restorative power in even the most difficult situations. Because where there is both vulnerability and tenderness, we know that God shows up.

THE GOD WE BRING

An important question to ask, as we approach those entrusted to our care, is “Who is the God I bring with me?” Consider the God we know in Catholic health care. There we find a God who enters willingly into the chaos of our world, who chooses to make a home in the midst of woundedness, confusion and darkness — and who finds beauty and blessing there. In Catholic health care, we are well equipped to enter into the experiences of those who struggle with the effects of mental illness and other challenges, because we bring with us a merciful, incarnate God who understands,

and “gets it.” In our willingness even to step into the fray, we can reveal something important about who God is for us.

Many of us are on a journey toward our own mental health. Some of us have a tougher road to walk and may be all too familiar with the fear, isolation and even destruction that mental illness — and its frequent partner, addiction — can leave in its wake. But many of us also know that there is, so often, more to the story. We know the wisdom

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that can emerge from struggle, and the sacred power that can be found in the midst of seeming chaos. Our health as individuals and communities depends upon our willingness to enter into the fray, time and again, with and for one another.

Today, make a choice to engage with someone who is struggling. Enter in. Be the presence of mercy that is needed. Do so with the expectancy that God will accompany you and that there may be creativity, compassion, friendship and other blessings to discover. And trust — wherever there is both chaos and mercy, always, always, there is God.

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