

9<sup>th</sup> January 2024

## Tears

**"There is a sacredness in tears.**

**They speak more eloquently than a thousand tongues."**

Samuel Johnson, *"Tears", Bangor Daily Whig & Courier (1841)*

In 1848, in *Life Thoughts*, the American Congregationalist clergyman and social reformer, Henry Ward Beecher, wrote this:

Astronomers have built telescopes which can show myriads of stars unseen before; but when a [person] looks through a tear in [their] own eye, that is a lens which opens reaches in the unknown, and reveals orbs which no telescope, however skilfully constructed, could do; nay, which brings to view even the throne of God ...

In flowery language and with the religious sentimentality of his day, Beecher highlights an important issue. Tears are a necessary part of life. They have their own inherent sacredness, as Samuel Johnson wrote in the quote above, and "bring to view even the throne of God". And if the religiosity of this image doesn't sit well with you, then value the human aspect of tears, which "reveal orbs which no telescope, however constructed, could do." Johnson is right. Tears can, indeed, "speak more eloquently than a thousand tongues."

When I began my hospice ministry, I was told by a colleague that tears wouldn't be appropriate for a chaplain. "The interaction will then become about you and not the patient or relative," I was informed. I'm pleased to say that the reality of spiritual engagements with people meant that tears – from me and them – were integral to a healing process.

Darragh was a young father whose wife was dying. They had two beautiful children and were a devout Roman Catholic family. I never saw him without a set of Rosary Beads in his hand. I'd spent a lot of time with him, and one morning when I came to the hospice, he was standing outside. His eyes were red, and I knew what had happened. When he saw me, he fell into my arms, and wept. And I cried with him. I don't know how many staff or relatives passed us in the doorway, or how long we cried together. But two broken men shared their feelings in their common tears.

Sacredness? Bucketloads of that. A thousand tongues of healing? Absolutely. And a view of the throne of God? Oh, yes! That too!

### **A prayer for today**

*Weep with me, Lord, for you and I are surely in distress together. Amen*