

In lasting memory

At whose grave do I find comfort and assurance? Which separations and which partings allow me look at life anew?

**On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.
John 11,17**

Upon visiting my hometown my first walk leads me to a grave. And then they are there again, the images. There is absolute quiet in the cemetery where over a thousand people silently take their departure. Parting from a twenty eight year old who died in an accident – while cutting branches off a tree on a steep slope one began to roll and crushed him. Pictures of a young man. His friendly and accommodating personality, his mischievous smile, his loving jabs at his overly talkative academic uncle, his willingness to help which was appreciated and taken advantage of by the whole village.

Images also of his crying mother and the stony expression on his father's face - who in this moment lost his son, the inheritor of the farmyard, his future and desired hope with one stroke. Four years have passed and, nonetheless, the images are present with every visit to the grave. When Jesus arrives in Hebron, which lies twenty kilometres south of Jerusalem, he visits a cave, the grave of the mother and father of his faith. Abraham bought this piece of land when his wife Sarah died, the first possession of property in the Promised Land. When Jesus stands on Mount Nebo, he thinks of the grave of Moses that remains unidentified until today. According to tradition, were his grave to be found the world could no longer exist because it would radiate so much light.

And in Jerusalem, one shows Jesus the grave of King David and tells him that it was David who conquered this city, built it up and made it a religious and political centre. When Jesus walks on the Mount of Olives by the graves of the prophets, he is often reminded of a hard and violent death. For Jesus graves are places of painful partings and at the same time places of remembering, new beginnings and hope. With this faith he also comes to the grave of Lazarus, a grave that has been cut into a cliff that one can still visit today. Jesus himself will be laid to rest in such a grave not far from Golgotha.

The culture around graves changes. Places of rest in the forest, urn churches and community graves have been added to traditional graves in cemeteries. What remains is the need to have a place to commemorate, to show the departed respect and to have a sign of lasting memory. The deceased nephew, his name and picture recorded on the cross, looks at me. The burning candle is a testament to the light that he radiates, the flowers a testament to life which ever blossoms anew.

And the cross does not deny the suffering that is bound up with death. When on All Souls' Day, at Christmas and after each mass parents, siblings, relatives and girlfriends gather around the grave one thing becomes apparent: the grave is a place for life and for cohesion. Visits to the grave, taking care of the grave are expression of a continuing relationship.

At which grave do I find comfort, assurance and peace? Which partings and which separations have taught me to look at life anew?