

Sharing the Darkness ~ the Spirituality of Caring

by Sheila Cassidy

"Whoever would be a companion to the dying, . . . must enter into their darkness, go with them at least part way along their lonely and frightening road. This is the meaning of compassion: to enter into the suffering of another, to share in some small way"

Sharing the Darkness is available on Amazon.com as well as her other books

Sheila Cassidy, MD was arrested and torture in 1975 in Pinochet's Chile for treating a wounded revolutionary. She is know as a writer and as who, drew attention to human rights abuse. This experience led ultimately to her work as Medical Director of a hospice for terminal cancer patients in Plymouth, England.

These excerpts are from her book: Sharing the Darkness

"From time to time I am asked if my contact with so much suffering makes me doubt the existence of God. Perhaps it should--but I can only grin and try to explain that, paradoxically, this work has given me an ever-deeper conviction of the existence of an all-powerful, all-living god who has the whole world in his hands.

"This conviction, I know, is shared by many people whose life and work bring them into immediate daily contact with suffering. True, there are the flashes of anger, the moments when heart and mind cry out why, why? What reason can there be for this monstrous pain, this anguish, this injustice? And yet, right in the midst of pain are the shafts of pure joy, the acts of generosity, the selflessness and of heroism which reveal the face of Christ. [Buddha, Shiva, Universal Love]

." . . this involvement can be like meeting a giant wave: it can catch you unawares so that you are bowled over and over, terrified, with your lungs full of water and mouth full of sand. Then after a while, if the ministry is right for you, you learn to cope with the sea. Sometimes you ride waves,

sometimes you duck just in time, diving blindly into the dark water—and sometimes your timing is wrong and you get knocked over again. Then, just as you think "I've had it," you surface, amazed to find that you are still alive.

[...to work with the sick and dying] "At the psychological level one needs three basic attributes:

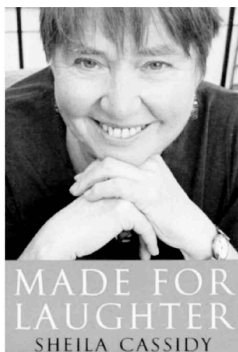
" . . . the first is an intensely down-to-earth practicality that does not flinch from the impact of the disintegration of human bodies and minds; the second;

" . . . and I believe it is be equally important -- is an oversized sense of humor, for life and death is a terrible tragicomedy and as the saying goes, "If you didn't laugh, you'd have to cry."

" . . . the third quality is a very special sort of sensitivity: a vulnerability to the pain of others that is often, but not always, the result of personal experience of suffering.

" . . . what they [the dying] want more than anything is that this thing should not be happening to them, that it should turn out to be a bad dream, that they should be rescued, cured, kissed better, made whole. But since this cannot be, they want someone to comfort them, to hold their hand, to face the unknown with them. They need a companion, a friend.

"So the spirituality of those who care for the dying must be the spirituality of the companion, of the friend who walks alongside, helping, sharing and sometimes just sitting, empty-handed, when he/she would rather run away. It is a spirituality of presence, of being alongside, watchful, available; of being there.



Other Books by Sheila Cassidy available at www.amazon.com

Alison has reviewed *Sharing the darkness: The spirituality of caring*. This book was exceptional in helping my understanding of holistic care and spirituality. My compassion as a palliative care nurse was greatly enhanced by Sheila's honesty. Review. Sheila Cassidy, Medical Director of a small hospice, tells her own story; including imprisonment and torture in Chile, and how this developed her as a human being, giving her increased compassion for others. Her style is easy to read as she explores her own reactions to what happens in her life and then tells her own journey from physician, to monastery, to hospice work. The following extract is from *Sharing the Darkness* which has the subtitle *The Spirituality of Caring. Precious Spikenard*. Mary's extravagant gesture (anointing the feet of Jesus with the expensive ointment, spikenard) must have been her way of saying to him, "I love you. I know what is going on inside you. I can't stop it happening, but I want you to know that I care and to take the memory of my love with you, to comfort you in the dark days ahead." Perhaps this episode gave Jesus the strength he needed, at that moment, to carry on with his mission. She also lectures on prayer and spirituality. *The Wilderness Experience*. As Christians I think we perhaps need to accept that we are always on a route to God which may pass through the desert: we dare not live on starvation rations.