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*One of the mothers in the Mother's Healing Circle at PBMR*

## Explosion of Grace

*By Sr. Donna Liette, CPPS*

Just a week ago, a woman was released after 30 years of living within prison walls. She had been incarcerated since she was 15 and had been expected to die in prison. As I watched her walk out into her freedom, I felt an explosion of grace as God met years of suffering with healing liberation and the promise of a new beginning.

Have you ever experienced an explosion of grace? Recently, I reflected on how many times I have been given this gift—unexpected grace that always overwhelms my heart and moves me closer to God and those around me.

I thought of how many times I have experienced that explosion of grace within the women we accompany at PBMR. It's impossible to count! Every day is full of explosions of grace in the joys and sorrows as we walk together on this journey of life and love.

Just today we had our monthly Mother's Healing Circle. Once again, I heard from the hearts of these women who are broken and bruised. The blood of their sons and daughters poured out on our streets through violent acts, yet these mothers are powerful

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witnesses of how God dwells among those most in need and explodes grace and beauty among us.

One mother, who has been traumatized in so many ways, shared how at her adult baptism she felt an overwhelming abundance of grace. She said she found purpose in all her suffering, and a calm came about her she had never experienced. All she could do was go home, cry, and give thanks.

Another mother shared how after her son had committed suicide, she ran out into the middle of a busy street in Chicago and cried out for help. She said God answered her prayer that day by sending her angels and friends to lift her up and providing a job she's now had for years—a job she loves and that gives her purpose. "I saw light in my darkness," she said, "and I was amazed. I have been moving forward ever since that day of God's attention!"

One of our grandmothers shared how when she hit rock bottom, she got down on her knees and didn't stop praying until God heard her cry. She felt an overwhelming movement, and she knew then she had been heard and was being healed. Since then, she has been in recovery and is moving forward toward her goals.

A mother who lost her two sons, murdered in their own home, is struggling with living. Darkness surrounds her, but yesterday she texted me to say that while she was walking and crying, she spotted two beautiful yellow daffodils and suddenly felt a strong feeling of hope (an explosion of grace!). Then she asked if I could teach her to meditate and learn of God's love for her.

Another mother who comes to mind has overcome obstacle after obstacle since her youth. But she keeps walking in faith and grace through these obstacles. Today, she has completed law school and passed her bar exam. She holds tight to her business card that reads "Attorney." She now offers advice and support to other women and mothers who face legal issues. She understands their fear of the unknown and accompanies them through this unjust system with the hope of embracing a more restorative way of being.

When I think of an explosion of grace, I think of the mothers who have forgiven the people who killed their sons or daughters and have asked that the perpetrator receive a lesser sentence.

I feel God's grace alive in all the women who come to us who have hit rock bottom, who have lost everything yet are still holding on—who are still seeking strength, something to eat, detergent to wash the few clothes they have, to care for their children and grandchildren as best they can. They come here, they want to live, they want to heal, and they want to know there is hope for them. Grace creates space for the unexpected—space for these women to let go and let God's grace show them what is possible and what is yet to come as they rise up.

Our mothers are crying out for the mothers and children in Ukraine. They know the pain of violence, of living in fear, of being evicted from their homes, of being without. Yet they see their pain is nothing compared to that of Ukrainian women and children. They want to help. They pray. They cry in solidarity.

We often hear that "hurt people, hurt people." But in our PBMR women, I see that "healing people, heal people." The women we accompany have experienced unthinkable trauma from violence, racism, poverty, and rejection. But as they find healing and hope, they are eager to pass on these gifts and graces to other women in the circle and beyond.

So, at PBMR we are blessed to help create those spaces where women, youth, and neighborhood friends (myself included) can experience explosions of grace, spaces of hospitality, hope, and healing; where there can be new ways of being together; where new relationships can form; and where new energy can be created for building our beloved grace-impacted Community.

May we all be aware of those "explosions of grace," be amazed, and give thanks! ✨