



## A Young Man Copes with Personal Tragedy

By the time he was in his 20's, the world was Edmund Rice's oyster. He was a successful businessman, having surmounted the obstacles blocking most Catholics who suffered under the Penal Laws in Ireland. He enjoyed a rich social life with loyal friends; he wore fashionable clothes, and like many Irishmen, enjoyed music, songs, and dancing. He met and married Mary Elliot, the love of his life, and their first child was on the way.



Then tragedy struck: toward the end of her pregnancy, his wife died. The baby was born prematurely. In those days there was no thought of a man rearing a child, especially a girl, by himself. He asked his unmarried sister Joan to come and live with him and give his baby daughter, Mary, the motherly care she needed.

What did Edmund do to cope with his grief? Like many young men of his age then and now whose future dreams have been shattered, he threw himself into the work of expanding his business. But work was not enough for this man who had grown up in a faith-filled home and been taught empathy and compassion at a young age.

His grief and search for meaning in this personal tragedy turned him to prayer and reflection and Holy Scripture. Edmund found consolation in the Book of Job, the story of man who had gained much and lost everything, but who grew in his understanding of and relationship with God. Considering the life of Jesus, he saw in this time of grief an opportunity to carry his own cross. At the same time he developed his concern for people who were even less fortunate than himself and increased his works of charity. He used his business and legal expertise to advocate on their behalf.

He sought spiritual direction and tried to remain open to what God might be asking of him now that his life had taken this unexpected and tragic turn.

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## Questions for reflection and sharing:

1. What struck you about this story?
2. What personal qualities and traits does Edmund show in this story?
3. If Edmund was with us today, what might he say to us who minister in, or on behalf of, this Christian Brother school?

## Prayer

### *Prayer response: Gracious God, hear our prayer.*

- In gratitude for Edmund's deep faith in God, compassion, and generosity, we pray to the Lord.
- That we may have the strength to cope with our own personal losses and grow deeper in faith, we pray to the Lord.
- That we may respond compassionately and generously to people to suffer from tragedy, loss, and deprivation, we pray to the Lord.
- *Please add your own prayers.... We pray to the Lord.*

### *Concluding Prayer:*

O God, we thank you for the life of Edmund Rice. He opened his heart to Christ, present in those oppressed by poverty and injustice. May we follow his example of faith and generosity. Grant us the courage and compassion of Edmund as we seek to live lives of love and service. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.