

Journey of Holy Week is apparent tragedy

The journey of Holy Week, which begins this Palm Sunday, is a journey of apparent tragedy. A young rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, who preached love, who healed the sick, raised the dead, and gave hope to the hopeless, is to be crucified as a false prophet and blasphemer. How unfair can life be?

On a feeling level, I found myself identifying with the pain of Mary at the foot of the cross with the pain of the loss of my cat Luke on Christmas night.

Few things are more heartbreaking than to watch someone you love die. When my mother died 25 years ago in 1983, I was able to do things that made the passage easier. I could visit her, bring Communion, anoint her and comfort her. When I got the news from Ellen on Christmas Eve that Luke was dying, I visited as often as possible between Masses.

Animals, as you may know, withdraw at that time. Luke hid behind a chair, behind the toilet, out of reach. I couldn't comfort him. I tortured myself with questions. Had I done all I could? Was this the right thing?

No doubt Mary asked herself questions. "Should I have insisted Jesus not go to Jerusalem? Could I have done something to change his mind?"

On the cross, Jesus cried out: "I thirst!" At one point I was able to crawl under a chair and hold a tall glass of water for Luke to drink. He sipped gently for a long time. It would be his last drink.

For Jesus, someone put a sponge of vinegar to his lips! How Mary's heart must have broken! How many cups of water had she given to her baby? How often she had nursed skinned knees and bruised legs. Now she had to watch Jesus being brutalized, and be unable to do anything!

Just before midnight on Christmas night, Luke let out a blood curdling cry. It broke my heart. I literally tore apart wires and cushions to get to the little guy. It was time

to end this torture.

On the cross, about 3 p.m. in the afternoon, Jesus cried out in a loud voice: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" The one who preached hope felt despair. The one who taught us to call God, Father, felt abandoned by that father.

Feelings are not facts. They're just feelings. Shortly after his moment of absolute anguish, Jesus would speak out again: "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit." The pain that obscured his vision, the torture that overwhelmed his senses, was finally overcome by a faith that would even conquer death. Jesus commended himself to a Father he could not feel, but a Father he would trust with his life.

Beyond Mary's tears and the ending of the terrible day, a new day was rising. Suffering would give way to meaning, death would give way to life as the news would break three days later that the tomb was empty! Mary's hope is our hope as we cope with the death of loved ones. Jesus' faith is our faith as we face our own deaths. Eternal life awaits us if we dare to live life with the faith of Jesus. And on the other side of the Rainbow Bridge our pets await us as well. It's all about trusting a good God!