

**God will always have the last word and it will be a word of love; a word of life. This I believe.**

**I believe it and proclaim it every time I celebrate a funeral Mass. God will always have the last word and it will be a word of love; a word of life.**

**Some deaths are more difficult than others. The death of babies and the young will never be easy to face. When I was a newly ordained priest 37 years ago, I had my first encounter with the death of a baby. It was a Sunday night and I was on call, which I hated because it meant that I couldn't go home to my parent's house for Sunday dinner and the five other priests who lived in the rectory usually weren't home. So, I was feeling lonely and when the call came in from the Intense Care Nurse, I hung up the phone and cried in self-pity. I felt so inadequate, so unprepared. What wisdom did a 26 year old celibate have to offer a couple whose baby was dying? There is no greater cross than to experience the death of your own son or daughter. What would I say?**

**When I got to the hospital, the Mom was holding her baby and the Dad was embracing them both. I prayed a couple prayers from the ritual and then simply asked God to help us be aware of his loving presence. There were a few moments of silence as the parents caressed their son and tenderly embraced each other and then the baby breathed his last.**

**After a while a nurse took the child and removed all the tubes and wrapped him in a clean blanket and we prayed once more as they held their son for one last time. Afterwards the parents thanked me and I apologized for not having more to offer. And then they ministered to me. They said, "Father don't apologize, it's not your words that bring us comfort, it's your willingness to be present with us. Your presence is a sign of God's presence with us. We had such hopes for our son, but in the few days he lived he brought us so much closer to each other and to God. We have named him Peter because he was our rock."**

**This young couple learned to see the presence of God in their lives through the eyes of faith and so when they experienced the death of their infant son they held on to each other in love and because of their faith and love even in the midst of the deepest sorrow they were not overwhelmed by the darkness of the human condition.**

**Yesterday, our men's faith group had a discussion about finding meaning in suffering. We are reading a book called the Search for Happiness by Fr. Oscar Lukefahr. I like his clear writing so much so that we use another of Fr. Lukefahr's books for our RCIA program. But his attempt to explain the why of suffering really didn't do very much for me. Suffering remains a mystery to me. I don't have a satisfying explanation for it. But I do know that our God stands with us in the midst of it. And I do trust that God will always have the last word and it will be a word of love; a word of life. This I believe.**

**Our faith does not save us from the human condition. Our faith will not protect us from all harm and suffering. The two sons who were brought back to life in today's scripture eventually did die. These readings point us towards a deeper healing. The point cannot be to stave off death. If that were the point, Jesus himself should never have died. But Jesus did die. And he was raised from death by the power of the Father's love. That is the point. No matter what cross we endure in his life, illness and sin, and even death itself will not have the last word. God will always have the last word and it will be a word of love; a word of life.**

**Our belief does not save us from the human condition. Faith is not a way out of trouble. Faith is a way through it. We don't believe in God because we think He'll keep us from harm. We believe in God because he stands with us. He just doesn't wave a magic wand of Divinity over our humanity and then quickly retreat to heaven. He suffers with us. By taking on our humanity and facing the cross, he gives himself to us eternally through the Resurrection. He gives himself to us in the silence of the Adoration Chapel and in Holy Communion. Whether our current circumstances lead to a new beginning in this life or the new beginning**

**of eternal life, we trust in God because we know that He loves us enough to be with us.**

**I look around this church today and I see people of faith. Some of you have had great crosses to bear and yet in faith you have felt the healing touch of Jesus. In faith you have a deep, deep sense that God has visited his people. In faith you have heard Jesus say to you, "I tell you, arise!" Arise from the darkness of anxiety. Arise from the darkness of grief. Arise from the darkness of shame from your own sinfulness.**

**The darkness of the human condition will not overcome us. We are people of faith who believe that Jesus stands with us. He became one of us. And he gives himself completely for the love of us. He died for love of us. And from that death the ultimate healing comes....for death does not have the last word. God, our Father through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, always has the last word and it is a word of love and a word of eternal life. This we believe! Amen! Amen!**