

There is never a happy time to lose someone you love, but for the Christian community there is no spiritually more profound time than Lent and Holy Week. For six weeks of Lent we perform exercises of restraint such as fast and abstinence. By doing without some of our normal comforts, we turn our minds to what can bring spiritual comfort. We are taught to think that obtaining things will bring happiness, but Lent schools us in the philosophy that doing without things brings a deeper sense of satisfaction. Anyone who has used Lent to lose weight, quit smoking, or cut back on social media can tell you about the fruits of abstinence.

The ultimate abstinence, of course, is death. Depriving us of all that the material world holds, death leaves us to ponder the spiritual realities of why we are here and how we should live.

Rita spent her life in faithful service to the community in the field of transportation and in loving relationships with her family. Her death has provoked not only grief, but also a sense of responsibility among those she leaves behind. She surely drew inspiration from the opening verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which the family suggested we hear today. It offers solace to those who do without - those who hunger and thirst, those who mourn, and those who are poor in spirit. All of these conditions of human loss are precisely the areas into which Christ can step with his message of life for those who face death.

This weekend Christians observe Palm Sunday, and we will hear the proclamation of the Passion of Jesus Christ. He entered Jerusalem amid the Hosannas of people who believed he could save them from their troubles, only to face - a few days later - his own torture and death. Next week we hear about the empty tomb, the news of the resurrection of Jesus, and the reason we believe in his promise of new life. We go through this exercise each year - the abstinence of Lent, the emotions of Holy Week, and the joy of Easter - because we need reminders about why we are here and how we should live.

St. Paul tells the Romans no one lives for oneself and no one dies for oneself. If we're honest, though, we often do. We care more for our own needs than the needs of others. We are tantalized by material things to the exclusion of the spiritual life. Yet every so often we confront these values - either with the annual observance of Lent and Holy Week or through the occasional sorrow that breaks into our hearts at the death of someone we love. Then, more than ever, we realize the truth of what St. Paul wrote: "If we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this is why Christ died and came to life, that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

My brothers and sisters, this week we ponder the deepest questions of human life. When we don't have all the answers, we say we are at a loss. We need not fear loss. Through it, we make a greater gain. We pray on this day that Rita, who suffered illness and separation may experience the gain of eternal life.