

Gary died shortly before Holy Week began, when all Christians remember the suffering and death of Jesus. Gary endured years of physical and mental suffering and required extraordinary care. His life was not easy. Nor was the life of those who loved him. Every death provokes both sorrow and release, but Gary's perhaps especially so. His family grieves the loss of one of its members, yet there is some relief that Gary's suffering has come to an end.

When someone needs special care, it often falls to the family to step in and take action. This brings its own challenges, but it also brings reward. When we reach out to another human being in times of distress, we gain new insights into the meaning of the life we share. We appreciate all the more the miracle of being alive, even in the most difficult circumstances. We affirm the dignity that every person deserves. We also sense the singular comfort we receive from loving someone who cannot love back in the same way. Mysteriously and providently, God gives us strength and reward when we do the right thing.

Jesus preached the importance of loving your neighbor, especially the poor and the oppressed. He demonstrated personal care for the sick and the dead. He built a community of believers who would perform the actions of love he inspired. He derived his own strength from prayer. The gospel today is an example his prayer. Often the evangelists depict him praying just before saying or doing something extremely important. In this case, he is about to address words of great comfort to his disciples. "Come to me," he says, in a passage that we too have all heard and obeyed. "I will give you rest," he promises. But before he tells his disciples this important message about the ease of his yoke and the lightness of his burden, he prays to his Father. He says, "although you have hidden ... things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike." In that prayer we discover the importance that God places on those who have less. Every human being has dignity, even those who lack common abilities; every human being reveals the mysteries of God. When we accept the light burden of the Christian way, we receive the reward of knowing God especially in those who are childlike.

Holy Week closes out the season of Lent, a time of repentance and self-discipline. It leads to Easter, a time to rejoice in the promise of resurrection. Gary died in Lent. We celebrate his funeral mass during Easter. We come here with gratitude for his life, for all the challenges, opportunities and joys that he gave. We offer hope-filled prayers for him. Christ promised a great gift for the disciples who followed his way. We pray that Gary will receive the gift bestowed on all those who respond to the command, "Come to me:" the gift of eternal rest.