

Nancy Cruzan finally stopped breathing this week. If you're unfamiliar with the case, Nancy's car crashed in southern Missouri in 1982, and since then her body has lain in a vegetative state. Her family asked to withdraw her nutrition, and the State of Missouri refused all the way to the Supreme Court. Only with additional evidence were they able to let Nancy die. The case raised ethical questions, like what is meaningful human life and when does one have the right to die. Nancy's family found peace in their decision, but other families agonize over similar situations. It's hard to know what to do.

When our lives reach a crossroads people long to know which path to choose: which job, which relationship, which action is right. Frequently we say we're waiting for some sign.

The most classic story of waiting for a sign is the Old Testament. From the time of Genesis, God promised a redeemer, and people longed to know, "Do we believe this God or not?" It took four thousand years of waiting for a sign before the star appeared in the East.

Two characters in today's Gospel illustrate this tremendous wait: Simeon and Anna. Both were elderly; both had foreseen that they would not die before they saw the Messiah. They had waited their entire lives for a sign. So when Mary and Joseph bring their gurgling baby into the temple, Simeon and Anna exult. Many prophets died without that vision--the greatest prophets: Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel--none of them beheld what they foresaw, until Simeon and Anna. God let them in on it. Their story illustrates a central theme of the Bible: God is faithful to his promise. He will fulfill our longings.

Simeon and Anna personally longed for a Savior, but their society longed for one for thousands of years. Similarly, ~~when we stand at~~ our crossroads, each of us personally longs for the fulfillment of our innermost desires, but our society longs for fulfillment as well: the abuse of drugs accelerates; the disregard for human life through abortion and homicide persists. South Africa, Northern Ireland, and the Mideast threaten war. Questions in medical ethics, like Nancy Cruzan's, become more and more puzzling. The family unit is changing. Just look at the movies of 1990. The family is no longer Ozzie, Harriet, and the kids. It's three men and a little lady, a pretty woman, a hunky ghost, or four mutant turtles. The family isn't what it used to be. Our society, our generations long for redemption.

Many of society's past longings have been fulfilled: It took generations to abolish slavery, to fight for civil rights, and to win respect for native American Indians.

I think every Christian family benefits from a Simeon and Anna. We benefit from someone telling us, "Look, I've been waiting and I've seen the promise fulfilled. I've heard the cry of a baby and smelled its freshness in my arms. I know you want what's best; I know you fear regrets, but I also know that God is faithful, and his promise for you will be fulfilled."