

Separated Twins

Eric and Sabrina brought their twin boys, Jacob and Joshua to Our Lady of the Gulf Church in Bay St. Louis to be baptized on July 11, 2009. There, gathered with extended family and friends, we celebrated the new arrivals and welcomed the Biblical twins into the Catholic Church.

On July 24th 2010, we gathered in the same church to celebrate a very sad and solemn occasion – the funeral of two year old, Jacob, the victim of lymphoma.

I look out my office window that overlooks the Gulf and I see a ring of azalea shrubs circling around a large oak tree. I notice two of the shrubs have received the kiss of death from the searing summer heat. As I look out, I think about Jacob as I try to put together some thoughts for his funeral homily and I see a parallel. I realize that every gardener has a rose bush or plant that never opens. In a way, the rose bush or plant is like every other rose bush or plant but there is something that keeps it from blossoming. It fades away without reaching maturity.

It seems the same thing happens in God's human garden. A baby is born, beautiful and precious, like Jacob; but fails to come to its rightful unfolding. Jacob, this child, like the azalea plant outside my window never fully opens up to life and matures. Somehow, he is gathered back into God's heavenly garden of souls where all imperfections are made perfect; where all cancers are non-existent; where all life struggles are replaced by eternal bliss; where all crosses are redeemed and were all sorrows are turned into happiness.

Jacob, a child of God, was named after a Biblical man of stature; a man with a powerful dream that was realized. Little Jacob wrestled with life briefly. We'll never know if he wrestled with an angel in his brief life but we do know that an angel has helped him climb that staircase to meet God at the top and be with him for all eternity.

We all know that things are supposed to happen a certain way. A person is born, grows up, reaches advanced years, dies and goes on to spend an eternity with God. That's our logic but, it seems, God does not deal in logic, he deals in love.

Jacob's mother, Sabrina, who works as an editor for a well known Catholic publisher out of Orlando, Florida, choose the readings for Jacob's Mass. Her first choice of Wisdom reminded us that in the view of the foolish Jacob was death but now he is in peace. Her second choice – first letter of John – reminded us that we are God's children now. What we shall later be has not been revealed to us, but it has been revealed to little Jacob for now he is able to see God face to face. Her gospel choice was from Mark, with Jesus inviting the children to come to him because the kingdom of God belongs to such.

Words fail us at funerals. Our words seem so inadequate. There are no words that will explain the death of a child, someone who was recently ushered into the world by God but is now, so suddenly, ushered out of it. Some people will say: "It is God's will." No! It isn't God's will. That is not the kind of God we believe in, a God who enjoys snuffing out life in its infancy.

Some people will say that "Jacob is in a better place." Of course, he is with God, but did God want him to die?

Yes, words fail us at times likes these and when they do, we have to look a little deeper, to something beyond logic and words – to faith. It is ironic that we come to a place – a church – where people experience a plethora of emotions; from joy to deep sadness; from reassurance to questioning; from happy beginnings to sad endings. Yet, this place, this church, was the place where, not only the seeds of faith were planted in his mother, his brother, his aunts, uncles, his grandparents and great-grandparents; they were most especially planted in Jacob as he died with Christ in baptism and, in such a short time, rose with him to new life.