

## **Traveling Companion: Is it okay to ask "Why?"**

### **Fr. Michael Tracey**

The Emergency Room at Hancock Medical Center called at 3:45 a.m. on Monday morning. A six-week old baby girl had died of S.I.D.S. and the family wanted a priest. I got dressed and arrived at the curtained-off cubicle to find Baby Jeanne lying on a stretcher. Her mother sat on a chair, flanked by her mother. A gentleman stood silently by. Later I found out he was a brother-in-law. Three nurses stood across from the family. The silence was deafening as I entered.

The mother sat in shock and disbelief. She glanced at the nurses. They glanced back at her. Silently, she was asking if everything was going to be okay. Without words, the nurses tried to tell her the truth but she still disbelieved.

The mother brought Baby Jeanne to the Coast from Indiana so that the baby's grandmother could see her grandchild for the first time. It was to be a special time of bonding, of sharing the joy. The mother had tried for so long to have a baby girl. She had three sons already and desperately wanted a baby girl. Elated with her arrival, now horror began to knock at the door of her heart.

She gathered Baby Jeanne up from the stretcher and cradled it in her arms. Again she looked at the nurses for some reassurance but it was not possible. She began to talk to Baby Jeanne and rock her ever so gently. "She's cold," she informed one of the nurses, "Can you get me a blanket." The nurse obliged the mother took the blanket and bundled it around her daughter and continue to rock her.

During the next thirty-minutes, very few words were said. Glances were exchanged but reality was far from real for the mother. The coroner arrived. She was introduced as the Medical Examiner. Seeing the distraught disposition of the baby's mother, the Coroner began to talk to the baby's grandmother, ascertaining some details and information for her report.

Again, the mother said, "she's cold," as he continue to hold her child. She brought her up close to her chest and said, "I can give her some of my blood. It will warm her up."

Gradually, reality set in. the Coroner reappeared and informed the family that state law required that an autopsy be performed. "You can't cut up on my child," she demanded. The nurse tried to explain to her that they needed to know the cause of death; that if the child had a heart or other problems that could be hereditary, the family should know about it and that such information would help them and help the mother in particular if she had more children.

Some time later, the funeral home personnel arrived. "Why is he here?" asked the mother. She was told who he was. Minutes later, the mother gradually gave her baby to her own mother who gently laid it in the arms of the funeral home director. "Will he hurt her?" asked the mother, through her perfuse tears. She was assured that he would take good care of Jeanne.

The family moved outside into the awakening morning. A cigarette calmed down some nerves temporarily. "We have no pictures of her!" exclaimed the mother. Moments later, one of the nurses with a neck strap that said "W.W.J.D." that help her I.D., reached into her pocket and gave a \$10 bill to the silent gentleman to go and buy a disposable, instant camera so that the family could have a picture of Jeanne.

Through it all, the mother began to ask, "Why? I had wanted a girl so badly and I got one and now God has taken her away from me again." Moments later, she would catch herself asking, "Is it okay to ask 'why?'"

Yes! It is okay to ask "why," because we want to know, because we care, because we love, because we want answers. Then, I remembered what Rainer Marie Rilke, the poet, once said; we have to love the question, until we discover the answer.