

# Au Revoir, Little Dove



*By Very Reverend  
Glennon Jones,  
Vicar General,  
Vicar for Clergy,  
Vicar for Religious*

**W**hat is it about babies? To see them in distress strikes to the very core ... the very *fi-ber* of the core ... of the heart. To see them in distress sounds the instinctive primal tocsin: "Save! Protect!!"

One of the saddest (and most difficult) duties of priests and ministers is to try (most often vainly) to comfort parents with a little one in medical distress. Such was the case the other day when called to Pediatric ICU at Presbyterian Hospital.

Of all persons to request a presence, there was none other than the commanding general of the New Mexico Army National

Guard—kudos to him for his concern for his troops, calling on behalf of one of his enlisted men and his wife. The patient: a four-month-old baby girl ... not expected to live much longer. Some sort of heart valve problem. Now ... a stroke. Could you please go baptize her? Roger that, General.

**A man asked God:  
"Why don't you  
do something to  
alleviate all the  
suffering in this  
world?!!" And  
God replied: "I did;  
I made YOU!"**

Presbyterian, being close, took little time to reach. Walking toward the entrance in these situations, one can't help but wonder about what awaits: what is the condition of the baby ... OR of the parents undergoing one of the greatest of sorrows imaginable? Enter the lobby ... the elevator ... exit onto the floor. The ominous red phone for entry to the PICU ... the watchful nurse at her station. The door to the room.

Within lay—upon a full-size hospital bed crowded close by monitors and alien contraptions of metal and circuitry—a tiny, helpless, precious little form, clothed only in diaper ... minute

stitching—blood-clotted—from throat to navel ... tubes and wires attached like something from "The Matrix." And yet ... peacefully sleeping ... her breathing almost imperceptible. Sleep, little one.

Daddy is there ... with forced mask of hopeful courage, clouded by frustrated helplessness, preparing for another all-night vigil. Momma—forced unwillingly away to care for their toddler—will return first thing tomorrow, every thought from now 'til then in that hospital room with her precious one ... her very heart. Baptism delayed 'til morning so Momma and big brother can be there.

There's little that one can do to comfort in such situations. Inevitably there is the unanswerable question: Why? In the secular realm, the answer might be callous: a defective gene, some external agent during pregnancy, etc. Cold logic. But, admittedly, neither is there in the theologically a perfect answer ... certainly not a sure answer. "Well, Padre, if your God is so peachy keen and loving, why does He allow such suffering?" Well ... can't answer that definitely, and certainly not case-by-case. And yet ... we know that there IS an answer, even if not readily discernible in our limitations. But, with mysteries in the scientific realm, the scientist knows that there must



be a logical answer—cause and effect. Likewise in the spiritual realm, though we may be ill-equipped to discern it, there IS an answer; we need look no further than the cross of Christ to discern that truth. But, what the cause ... what the effect?

We can speculate only, but we witness how suffering elicits our sympathy, and thereby our charity. Yes, the suffering of a child strikes us most deeply, but are we stricken by the sufferings of others around us? One could posit that the evil of suffering is allowed in order to cultivate the even greater fruit of care and charity. We might muse: If there were no suffering, would there BE charity? ... would there even BE self-sacrificial love? Suffering is for the most part involuntary ... simply endured; however, self-sacrificial charity is an act of the will ... the purposeful and voluntary giving of oneself for the good of the other. It is an act of virtue. It is, in its essence ... love.

Even Jesus tells us that suffering will always be with us: "...you always have the

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poor with you, and whenever you will, you can do good to them..." (Mark 14:7) We might, in that statement, just as easily read "suffering". We might then remember the rather overused but pertinent parable: A man asked God: "Why don't you do something to alleviate all the suffering in this world?!!!" And God replied: "I did; I made YOU."

And thus we can point to Jesus' parable of the talents of gold given to servants to invest (Matthew 25:14-29). We are all given talents, not of gold but of abilities, be it intellect, wealth, limitless energies, or whatever. As St. Paul writes: "... there are varieties of gifts, but

the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) Whatever our "talents", we are called even by our secular society to use them for the greater good, which is to alleviate suffering in some form. How much more so called by God to do so?

Scanning the PICU, I couldn't help but admire very much the doctors and nurses who work in such units, suppressing instinctive horror at slicing into an infant for the goal of maintaining her life, like firemen suppress fear to rush into a fire. We can surmise that such medical personnel likely have infinite gratification when things go right, but perhaps tortured self-searching—perhaps even great self-doubt—when they do not. And yet ... they endure.

[Later]: Well...our little one spread her wings and flew back to God. In love, fellowship and camaraderie in suffering we continue to pray for comfort for her family, and for all those in such straits. But, dear healers, we are grateful beyond words for your valiant sacrifice and sense of duty; our prayers go with you ... as they go with all who serve in healing and service professions, exercising that incomparable virtue of charity.

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