

Escaping from Pain

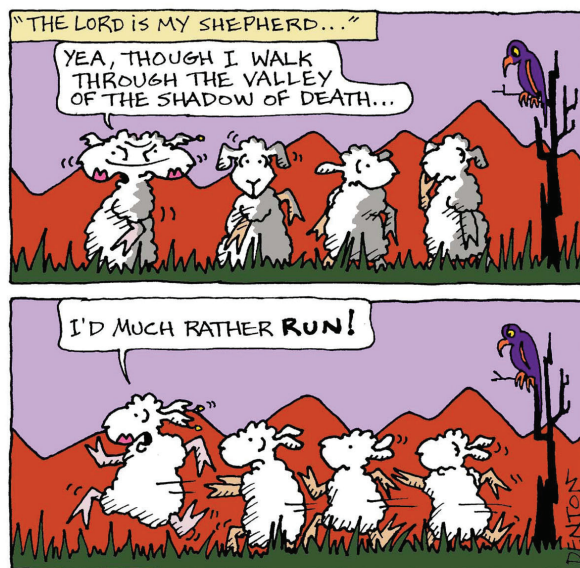
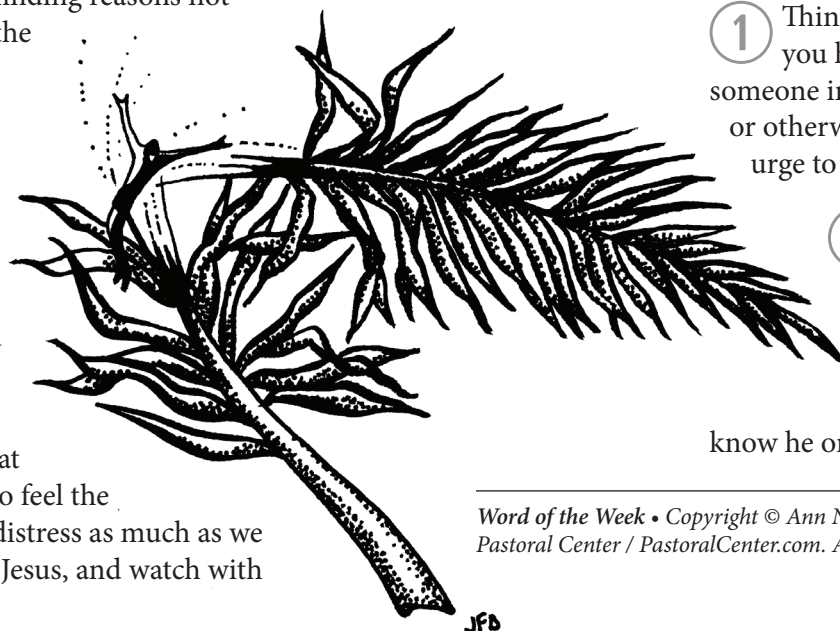
This Week's Readings at Mass

- ▶ Matthew 21:1-11 • Triumphal entry into Jerusalem
- ▶ Isaiah 50:4-7 • Salvation only through the Lord's servant
- ▶ Philippians 2:6-11 • Jesus, compassionate high priest
- ▶ Matthew 26:14-27:66 • The passion of Jesus

On Palm Sunday, we hear two Gospel readings. The first tells us of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. The second is the full Passion account. In between are readings from Isaiah and Philippians, reminding us of Jesus' humility and willingness to be the suffering servant of God. The combination of scriptures moves us from rejoicing and praising Jesus along with the people waving their palms on the roadside to the disturbing events that lead to his arrest, trial, and death. These scripture passages are an emotional roller coaster ride.

The entire Passion story is difficult to read and hear because it is challenging to be with people who are in pain, especially when they are people we know and love. Even if we have the desire to stay present and remain loyal, Peter, James, and John remind us that sometimes the pain is just too great and we escape from it. Jesus' three friends escaped the discomfort of being with Jesus in his agony by sleeping. Others of us avoid pain in other ways, perhaps with food, alcohol or drugs, exercise, forms of entertainment or technology use, overworking, etc. Sometimes our escape is simply by finding reasons not to spend time with the person in pain.

St. Ignatius wrote a program of prayer called *The Spiritual Exercises*. He urges all those who are praying the Exercises to stay present to Jesus during his Passion. He suggests that we allow ourselves to feel the agony, sorrow, and distress as much as we can, to remain with Jesus, and watch with



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"If it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will."

Sheepish Question:

What am I afraid of?

him as he asked his friends to do in the Garden of Gethsemane.

We cannot be physically present to Jesus in his suffering now, but surely there are people in our lives who are suffering with whom we can remain awake. It might be a form of agony for us to watch and to share in another's pain, but when we do it for others, we do it for Jesus.

Questions of the Week

① Think about an experience you have had of being with someone in their pain: physical or otherwise. Did you have any urge to run away or escape it?

② Think of someone in your life now who is suffering. How might you make yourself available so that person will know he or she is not alone?