

Is That Your Final Answer?

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When you look at the liturgical calendar it is easy to see that Christmas and Easter, our most celebratory seasons make up about twenty-five percent of the year. Ordinary time occupies about half of the time, with Lent and the Triduum making up about the remaining twenty-five percent. What an interesting arrangement! We know that in the reality of our daily lives it isn't so tidy. Celebrations and sufferings get all mixed up.

I recently led a retreat in which the participants had an opportunity to look at this reality in their daily lives. It doesn't take a lot of digging to find the "mix-up" of pain and suffering. One woman shared her joy at her son's recent marriage to a remarkable young woman, and her sorrow at their relocating far from home. Another participant shared his grief at losing a life-long friend to illness, and his joy in knowing that his friend no longer suffers. Each person at this retreat is a person of hope and of faith. Their suffering is real. They have lived with suffering, and they know that in all likelihood, there will be more suffering in their lives. Yet they are, individually and together, people of hope.

What makes us able to endure suffering? What enables us to see not *past* the suffering, but *through* the suffering? Faith? Hope? In what?

Our Catholic faith tradition and our life experience tells us that we do not live our lives alone, that through our baptism we are in solidarity with all of humanity, even all of creation. In suffering our faith is sustained by knowing we are not alone. We receive support and courage, the ability to endure; even to celebrate in our suffering because we know others pray for us, just as we pray for others. We pray for others, and their burden becomes ours to share.

Why do we persist? Why do we welcome the opportunity to share others troubles? Don't we have enough of our own? We are a both/and people. We know that we will die, and we will rise. How do we know this? What in the world tells us that something so unbelievable is not just believable, but the deepest, surest truth that there is?

Only this, that Jesus, the Son of God, took on humanity, lived, suffered like we do, died like we will, and then rose from the dead. And so, like him, we will rise. Death isn't the final answer. Suffering doesn't have the last word. The last word is the same as the first – Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia!