Opinion
Guest Voices



Photos of Rita, Stephanie Yeagle's grandmother, are displayed at the memorial service. (Courtesy of Leah Sears)



by Stephanie Yeagle

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April 18, 2025

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During the past few weeks, my pastor has been reviewing several theories of atonement in an attempt to answer the age-old question of why Jesus had to die. Did Jesus die for purely selfless reasons? Was it an act of moral penance or retribution? Was the crucifixion a transaction of our sins in exchange for the Son of God's death? What was God's message?

As a concept, death is hard to wrap our heads around. In one moment, a person we love and cherish is there with us and in the next moment, they are gone. That suddenness, even if we are prepared in some way by a long illness or hospice, can't be reconciled as quickly. It's why grief is such a difficult emotion to process. It is complicated and painful.

Now try to understand why God would send his Son to die for us. We have all experienced loss and grief and death. Why is it so easy to take Jesus' crucifixion for granted? How should we acknowledge his sacrifice during this Holy Week?



A crucifix hangs before a mural depicting the Resurrection in the sanctuary at St. Timothy Parish in Mesa, Arizona, in this undated file photo. (OSV News/Catholic Sun/J.D. Long-Garcia)

Pope Francis, who appeared in front of more than 20,000 pilgrims on Palm Sunday, gives us a clue. "Brothers and sisters," the pope said, "in order to experience this great miracle of mercy, let us decide how we are meant to carry our own cross during this Holy Week: if not on our shoulders, in our hearts."

I lost my grandmother a few weeks ago. I spent the last week with my family mourning her passing, but also celebrating her very full life.



Stephanie Yeagle, right, is pictured with her grandmother, Rita (NCR photo/Stephanie Yeagle)

Losing the matriarch of a family is tough. The tether that holds everyone together is gone, leaving those relationships unmoored and changed. The uncertainty surrounded us like a misty fog, making it nearly impossible to find our way through.

It's fitting that the service, along with her graveside service, would be held right before Holy Week. My grandmother had a very deep faith, one that sustained her

through the loss of my grandfather 25 years before. She told me once that although she missed my grandfather dearly, she was never lonely. She had her church family, and she had her Savior.

At the service, my grandmother's pastor read aloud a poem that my grandmother had picked out years ago. There was no author and no title, which is odd because my grandmother was a reference librarian. I searched and searched for whoever wrote the poem, but have not found any information on it.

Nevertheless, the ending stanza gave me great comfort and I haven't stopped thinking about it since:

> Because I place my faith in Christ,
> Fore'er with Him I'll dwell
> So please don't grieve, but rest assured
> That I'm alive and well!

Is this why it's easy to feel God's grace through Jesus' death and resurrection? Because we know that Jesus is alive and well?

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"Mary and the others experienced the cost of resurrection before they comprehended its grace," writes St. Joseph Sr. Mary McGlone in a reflection on the Easter readings. "They could authentically proclaim the living Christ because, with him, they had suffered the power of evil and witnessed its demise. The Easter proclamation has its deepest meaning for those who have confronted the demonic, hoped against hope, and been given an intimation of evil's downfall and the transformations that began with Christ's victory."

Perhaps that's something we all need to remember this Holy Week. Despite the uncertainty of where we go from here — whether it is personally or politically — we have a tether that we can hang onto, we have the cross to which we can cling.

As we write in our recent editorial: "This Holy Week, let us allow prayer to rise from our lives — not perfectly, but sincerely. Let prayer rise from our confusion, hope, weariness and joy. Let prayer draw us into deeper relationships with one another, creation and a God who is always near."

This story appears in the **Lent 2025** feature series. View the full series.