

# Parish Resource

## Reflection at Mass for a Stillborn Baby

*in memoriam* baby Rowan Michael



Photos: www.giftsforremembrance.co.uk

Life can be perplexing, dark and mysterious. It has a habit of throwing things at us that become road-blocks, blunt realities that we can't make our way past by our normal reasoning and thinking. Hard experience teaches us that our intellect simply doesn't take us all of the way all of the time.

Today, we're up against one of those road-blocks. As Christians, we believe that God our Father is the giver of life, the lover of life, the sustainer of life. And yet, we're here marking a life that has been very fleeting, very transient. Can we square this circle? Can we find a way of reconciling our belief in a God who gives and loves life, with the hard fact that little Rowan's life has been so very brief?

The fact is, of course, inescapable. Today, rather than wondering what Rowan will grow up to be, we are wondering at God and at what he allows. But in reflecting on what God has allowed, I would suggest that little Rowan's all-to-brief sojourn with us – with his parents, Enda and Rachel – can teach us two important lessons.

First, Rowan's short life reminds us that the deepest instinct of the human

heart is love. Consider this tiny child – he had no achievements; he hadn't yet begun to develop qualities of personality; he hadn't yet, in the normal sense, left any mark or impression. But he has been loved and cherished! The instinct to love is prior to, and more fundamental than, any 'things' or qualities that might elicit affection. Rowan has been loved and cherished simply because of his existence! His life was a gift, and it was accepted and anticipated as a gift. We can say that Rowan's whole little life has been just one thing: an invitation to love. This has been his life's achievement: he has invited love.

A second thing Rowan's little, all-too-short life teaches us (and it's a point made eloquently by the tiny casket here in front of us) is that littleness, tininess, weakness and vulnerability are especially loveable – these qualities appeal in a particularly strong way to our instinct to love. Smallness and weakness have a particular way of drawing the largeness and the strength of love from our hearts.

So, where does this leave the mystery of things? Perhaps we're being reminded that the mystery before which we are gathered is not, after all, some cold

riddle, or a puzzle waiting to be solved. It is, rather, a mystery of love. The answer offered is not a 'solution,' but a further invitation to see love as our deepest reality – our origin and our destiny. To Love, we now entrust little Rowan Michael. We try to take our leave of him peacefully; if not quite joyfully, perhaps with some lightness of heart, with a small, flickering flame of hope and gratitude.

*The Editor*