

*In the name of God. Amen.*

A new image for Lent and Holy Week came into my head the other day. It seems that Lent is like the beginning of a roller coaster ride. You get in one of the cars, sit down, and put the bar down over your lap on Ash Wednesday, and you begin the long climb up the first rise. It seems to take forever, slowly chugging upward, jerking as the gears change on your way up and up and up. I think it takes about 5 weeks to get to the top.

And just when you think you can't wait any longer, you make it to the top and ohhh-ver you go, faster than you can imagine it would go, screaming with exhilaration and delight, waving your hands in the air and shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David!"

It's Palm Sunday. The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. All glory, laud and honor to Thee, Redeemer King. We're saved.

But then we get to the bottom of the long drop and everything goes crazy. The track whips the cars around - jerking us one way and then the other, so that our heads feel as if they might just fly off of our necks. Left and right, up and down, right and left, down and up, and here comes the part where we turn completely upside down for a couple of twirls. We're dizzy...perhaps a little sick at our stomachs. What's going on?

It is the beginning of the Passion - the suffering - of Jesus. As we move through the twists and turns of our wild ride, we hear the stories of how when Jesus raised

Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests began to plot to kill him; of when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair. There's Judas, who made a deal to give Jesus up to the authorities...for a price.

Another jerk to the right, and there's the Passover meal, where Jesus already knew he was going to be betrayed, but invited the betrayer to eat with him. Where he washed the feet of his followers.

A quick up and down, and there is Jesus, praying in the garden. All he wants is someone to stay with him, so he won't be alone. Groan. Jerk. Our grips on the safety bar get tighter. Our hands are sweaty.

And now, the upside down twirls, where everything becomes a blur: the arrest, the mock trial, screaming citizens outside Pilate's balcony. Crucify him!

He hangs on the cross. His suffering is palpable. Right, left, right. He breathes his last. Jerk. Groan.

They put him in a tomb. We're still riding at high speed. Will the ride ever end?

A roller coaster ride is not really a roller coaster ride if you get to the end without going up and down and left and right and over and over. And Easter is not Easter unless we make the journey of Holy Week. I can't promise that you might not be dizzy, or even a little sick at your stomach. But I guarantee you that the journey is worth it.