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**Tim Sullivan** Family Life Director

## Why does God allow awful things to happen?

Sometimes you wonder why God allows so much bad stuff to happen. I went through one of those times recently when the weakness of our humanity was getting me down.

It started on a Saturday night when my wife rented a movie about the Nuremberg trials, in which certain Nazi leaders responsible for the holocaust during World War II were tried for crimes against humanity. During the trials, pictures of bodies in mass graves in the concentration camps were shown to the judges. Watching the movie was a very sobering experience.

The following Monday was the 28th anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade decision which legalized abortion in the United States. In those 28 years, there have been something like 35 million abortions in the United States alone. Along with the abortion holocaust has come a growing new industry, the buying and selling of body parts from aborted babies.

On the very next day, the execution of Mark Fowler was scheduled at the state penitentiary in McAlester. His crime was bad enough, but it was also distressing that the State of Oklahoma was responding to his violent acts with violence of its own. It was distressing also that the governor of our state, who is proud of his Catholic heritage, had pronounced that



the Pope was wrong in opposing the death penalty.

While driving down to McAlester that night to participate in the prayer vigil outside the prison walls, I wondered what it was like to be Mark Fowler. I wondered what would be going through his mind two hours before his execution.

I wondered also about his father. What would it be like to be the father of a convicted murderer scheduled to die by lethal injection? From what I knew, Mark Fowler had grown up in a fairly normal Catholic home. He became involved in drugs as a teenager and started hanging out with bad characters. One night he participated in the robbery of a business. Three employees were killed. Afterward, even though he denied doing the killing, Mark and his accomplices partied on drugs.

Wouldn't the father of Mark Fowler wonder about his own shortcomings? Wouldn't he feel somehow responsible for the deaths of the three men? Wouldn't he feel like his life was a failure? These were the questions going through my mind.

Right after Mark Fowler was executed, his father, Jim, and his uncle, Father Gregory Gier, rector of Holy Family Cathedral in Tulsa, came out from witnessing the execution to visit with those who participated in the prayer vigil. Father Gier said that Mark had truly been at peace. When asked if he had any final words, Mark had prayed the Hail Mary. Father Gier said that in the 15 years that Mark Fowler

had been on death row, he had matured greatly. Father Gier exclaimed that, "It's amazing what God will do to get someone where he needs to be."

As for Jim Fowler, he was literally radiant with joy. He must have noticed that people were looking at him strangely, wondering how he could be so happy right after the execution of his son, because he said, "I'm not this strong. God has been heavy with me since last Sunday." He didn't mean that God had been a burden, but, on the contrary, God's loving presence in him had been especially intense since the previous Sunday. God's love had lifted him up and given both him and his son a deep sense of peace. They had entered into and shared the spiritual dimension of life together.

God is so good, so loving, that he can take a terrible event like a senseless murder and redeem the people involved. There's no situation, no killing, no abortion, not even mass destruction, that is so bleak, so desperate, that He can't overcome it with His grace.

So why does God allow awful things to happen? In Romans 9, St. Paul explains that God has with great patience put up with the "vessels of wrath" so that "He may make known the glorious riches ready for the people who are the instruments of His faithful love."

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