

SHORT LIVES AND LONG LIVES

I often remember the 18-year-old son of a family I know, who suddenly became ill and, within a week, had died. The whole family and others who knew him were distraught. He'd brought so much love, fun and pleasure to them and others they knew. It all seemed so unfair. At the time, I couldn't help wondering why it was such a short life.

As I mulled over this, I also thought of the most sinful and terrible dictators, both current and in the past, and asked myself why most of them lived much longer lives. It all seemed so unfair.

I mentioned it to a Catholic friend who said it was a good question, but only God would know why. I knew he was right, but I still wandered. I concluded that I would probably never have an answer, but eventually, I did work out one that suited me.

It happened when I was a Catechist teaching innocent 8 to 9-year-old youngsters. It was the innocent questions they asked. I didn't know the answer to most of these and had to research them to get the answers. A few of these questions were:

Can anyone become Pope?

Why does God never allow us to see him?

Why did the Apostles have to die so brutally?

Why did God let John the Baptist die brutally and so young?

Why doesn't the bread and wine change into real flesh and blood?

Why do priests wear strange clothes at mass?

Why have angels stopped appearing to people?

Why didn't Jesus save the Israelites from the Romans?

Why do we live for only 100 years?

There were many more questions like these, and I had to answer them all, causing me to research them and ask others for any help they could give me. When you look at these, how many could you answer?

The beauty of going through all those lessons many years ago was that it automatically increased my knowledge of Catholicism, even though I know I still have much more to learn today.

Over the years, while teaching the youngsters and gathering so much understanding about Catholicism, I managed to provide myself with an answer to my question about why many good people die so young and why many wicked people live so long.

I believe that God took the 18-year-old because he wanted him to experience the wonder of heaven sooner rather than later as a reward for all the good works he'd done.

I also like to believe that God, because of his great compassion and forgiveness, lets sinful dictators and other evil-doers live long lives, giving them every opportunity to repent and ask him for forgiveness sincerely.

Not knowing God's reasons for his decisions does not mean we cannot determine our own, so long as they do not challenge his laws.

We should pray to God regularly for help to do what he wants and use our limited knowledge and wisdom in a way God would approve.

When anyone I know dies, it always causes me much sadness, but it does help when I remember the following epitaph:

**REMEMBER, I'VE NOT LEFT YOU
I'VE JUST GONE AHEAD OF YOU.**