As a young child, I lived on a remote military base in the far north which was served by a small clinic. If anything was complicated, the military would fly the patient to a big city hospital that was better staffed. The situation is similar to the people in the bush who need to fly into Nome or Anchorage for more medical care than is possible in a village clinic.

One afternoon, I found myself in the clinic under the watchful eye of my mother as a medic was preparing to dislodge some foreign object that I had managed to stuff in my ear. I had suffered from many earaches and my nerves were on edge. I was only four or five at the time and I was very anxious and apprehensive.

The medic was interrupted by an emergency in another room at the end of the hallway. A fifth grader had broken his arm, and the staff refocused their attention to deal with the more pressing problem. My mother went to investigate and learned that it was my older brother Michael who was in screeching pain at the other end of the clinic.

With a little wisdom from above, my mother asked my brother Michael to pray for me. It helped to calm him down so that the staff could set his arm in a cast. Likewise, my mother returned to me and asked me to worry about my brother and his broken arm more than myself. This too had a calming effect. In time, the medic was able to extract a foreign object of unknown origin from my ear that helped to alleviate my pain. Exhausted, my mother brought the two of us home and went on to worry about our two younger brothers who also needed a mother’s loving attention and care.

As we enter into Holy Week, every corner of the globe is concerned over the pandemic. 1, 200,000 cases and climbing. And deaths in excess of 65,000. We do not know when it will end. We only know that we have had to make many sacrifices and limit much of our freedom in an effort to slow down a virus for which there is no known cure. While over 98% of those who become ill will recover, the large number of deaths and the disruption to our daily lives is immense. Could anything be worse? Let us pray for our brother Jesus who is at the other end of the hallway in the most dire of straits.

On Palm Sunday and on Good Friday we hear two different accounts of the Passion and death of Jesus. Is there anything more horrendous than the scandal of the Cross? God sent his only beloved Son to save us and the response was rejection, abandonment, torture and capital punishment. The litany of sins is a familiar one:

- Judas will betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. Peter will deny him 3 times before the cock crows. The other apostles will scatter in fear. And all of this from his closest friends whom he had mentored in the school of discipleship.
- His enemies, those who were more worried about their own self-serving interests of remaining in power, will plot to have him arrested and put to death. Those who had cheered him as he entered Jerusalem for the Passover, will give way to a mob mentality and yell “Crucify him. Crucify him!”

At the darkest moment in history, it appears that evil will triumph over all that is sacred and holy. With all of this trouble brewing and ready to boil over, Jesus responds with a self-sacrificing love. He gathers his apostles for a final Passover meal, and he presents a new meaning for it.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins (MT 26:26-28). Instead of worrying about himself, Jesus worries about us. On Holy Thursday, he pours wine into a chalice and blesses it to help us overcome our sinful nature.
After the Lord’s Supper, Jesus heads to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. “My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!” (Mt 26:39) This is love personified. Out of love for Our Father in heaven, Jesus willingly lays down his life for our salvation. On Good Friday, at about three o’clock Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) As Jesus gives up his spirit: “The earth quaked, rocks were split, tombs were opened, and the bodies of many saints who had fallen asleep were raised... ‘Truly, this was the Son of God!’” (Matthew 27:51-52, 54) The Love of God is the most powerful force in heaven and on earth. Good triumphs over evil. Jesus conquers sin and death.

Let us pray for acceptance of the gifts our brother Jesus has offered us. Let us pray for understanding of his love so that we may follow his lead and love each other as he has loved us.