

From the Pastor's Desk

God's plans for us are many and varied; however, they are always good, and God is always faithful. This past Friday, when I was preparing to return home from the ablation that I had on my back (which I must say seems to be proving to be very successful, praise God), I was awakened in my hotel room, and I was coughing pitch black mucus which caused me some concern. Later in the morning, when I was taking a shower, I again began to cough up more pitch-black mucus. I returned home to Johnstown to attend to some very important matters that needed to be addressed since my three day absence. Around 2:15 PM I felt very congested, and in light of the black mucus, I excused myself from stations of the Cross and I asked Cathy Fuska to take me to "Lifelines" in Richland (an equivalent of I- care, which I highly recommend) to be "checked out." To make one of many long stories short, the PA there said that she could not determine what was wrong with me if I did not have a soft tissue CAT Scan. Therefore, I proceeded to Windber Hospital ER to be evaluated and to have the CAT Scan. After 4 ½ long hours, I was told that I had bi-lateral pneumonia and a potential deep fungal infection in my lungs. As a result, the ER physician called Allegheny General Hospital to determine the next step in treatment and they insisted that I be admitted to AGH; however, they did not have a bed. As a result I had to spend the night in the Windber Hospital ER and wait for a bed to become free. About mid-morning on Saturday, a bed became open, and I was admitted to Allegheny General Hospital. Again, to make a long story short, I remained in AGH until Tuesday morning receiving breathing treatments and intravenous antibiotics. I was sent home with a seven-day course of antibiotics. To be honest, at the time of this writing (late Thursday night), I do not feel %100 percent, but I do feel much better. I went on Wednesday to Forbes Hospital for my weekly iron infusion that went very well. This evening, we celebrated our annual Lenten penance service which was relatively well attended and a very prayerful evening for both those who were reconciled as well as the priests who served as ministers of sacrament. Afterward, the priests and I returned to the rectory for some food and fellowship which was very fraternal and uplifting for me. I end this week feeling very grateful to God for many blessings amidst some hardships, all of which will be part of my conversation with Christ this evening once the bulletin is completed.

While I was in the hospital recovering, I found many of my thoughts and prayers directed toward the virtue of fortitude, which is essentially courage, which I believe that Pope Francis said is a virtue that we need in abundance when we are faced with difficulties associated with but not limited to serious illness.

Love gives us more than the clear vigilant eye that catches the paths of affection and exposes dead ends. It also exposes the virtue of fortitude (courage) or “strength of the soul.” Love makes us inwardly strong. As Paul says, “Love bears all things” and “endures all things.” (1 Cor 13:7). Love’s strength of soul is proclaimed and demonstrated from the Cross of Christ. There we see that love is as strong as death. It is at the foot of the Cross that we see that the strong-souled love has a sharp eye for the afflicted. He, the man of sorrows, comforts the weeping women and mothers, He turns in prayer to us sinners, to all sinners: “Father, forgive them.” With wonderfully expressive love, he turns to all outcasts in the thief: “Today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Lk 23:43). The strong love of Jesus is the single flame in which love for the Father and for us human beings meets and fuses.

The strength of Jesus’ love unto death is matched in his utmost daring. In a figurative, yet concrete sense, we can call the creation of humanity – with our fragile freedom that can even deny its origins - an unheard of, bold, and daring decision prompted by the strongest love. This boldness is only exceeded by the work of redemption. Here, the Word of God takes on the form of a slave, in order to lure humanity onto the true path of life and bring us to a boundless love, What greater boldness of love could be imagined than the way of the Cross trodden by the non-violent Son and Servant of God.

The responsive love of human beings should have in it something of this boldness of the divine yet human love of Jesus. Why? Because through our intimate connection with Jesus, initiated by Him and strengthened through prayer we gain the fortitude, the courage, to engage life’s difficulties and allow them to become opportunities for grace. Thus, once again, I give thanks to God for blessing me with the virtue of fortitude both during my most recent illness and throughout the season of Lent. It is my earnest prayer that you too may growth in “holy” courage both now and through all the periods of difficulty that you confront either regularly or in any unique situation.