

Don't Forget Your Daily Dose

Did you take your vitamins today? What about your prescription meds? We do many things daily—exercise (or try to); call our elderly parents or our children, get plenty of rest, drink 8 glasses of water...but, do we have a *daily* intake for our spiritual health and wellbeing? Let's hope so! Prayer, Scripture, Mass, Adoration. Perhaps it is time to assess what we are doing (or not doing) and how we can continue in good spiritual health. A daily intake of God is a great remedy for many things that may ail us. Be attentive to starting good habits with Lent starting this week, and may they continue even after Easter. Remember, not just medication, but also meditation is a daily health supplement!

Knowing True Beauty

I wouldn't recommend lying to your spouse like this man did, but I found this a good, moral story:

A man married a beautiful girl. He loved her very much. One day she developed a skin disease. Slowly she started to lose her beauty. It so it happened that one day her husband left for a tour. While returning he met with an accident and lost his eyesight. However, their married life continued as usual. But as days passed she lost her beauty gradually. He continued to love her and she also loved him very much. Then she died. Her death brought him great sorrow. He finished all her last rites and wanted to leave that town.

A man from behind called and said, "Now how will you be able to walk all alone? All these days your wife used to help you." He replied, "I am not blind. I knew it would have pained my wife more for me to see her disfigured, more so than the disease already did. I didn't love her for her beauty alone, but I fell in love with her caring and loving nature. So I pretended to be blind. Her happiness meant that much to me."

Moral: When you truly love someone, you will go to any extent to keep your loved one happy and sometimes it is good for us to act blind and ignore one another's short comings in order to bring peace and happiness. Beauty can fade with time, but heart and soul will always be the same. Love one another for what is inside, not outside.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

I try not to watch infomercials on television. But I find it amusing that they don't want to just sell you the product. They will give you a second one free if you call in the next hour. They will include a set of steak knives and kitchen utensils with the rotisserie you purchase, and give you free shipping as well. Makes it harder to pass up the deal, right?

In our Triune God, we indeed get a great "package" deal: God the Father, who created us and watches over us; God the Son who died for us; and God the Holy Spirit who guides us to make wise decisions in our lives. And the best part of it is that this offer holds a "life time guarantee," provided we don't toss our faith to the wayside. Don't pass up THIS deal!

If You Choose

Over the years I have heard stories of individuals and families who prayed fervently for healing for someone suffering greatly from illness, poverty and other special needs. Over the hours, even years of praying, many times it appeared the prayers went unanswered. It can lead us to ask, "Why, Lord, why would you not grant this need, which is so very important?" Some may even leave the Church asking, "Where is this God who supposedly loves us? Where is He when we cry out for help?" Well I found a recent homily very helpful regarding this.

Read Mark 1:40-45, which we heard last month. In this Gospel a leper came to Jesus saying, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Jesus answers, "I do will it. Be made clean." Notice the key words in what the leper requests: "**If you wish.**" Did not Jesus say the same thing to God the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane? Here is the key: If our request is what God deems best for our salvation AND THE SALVATION OF OTHERS, it will happen. Jesus did not want to endure the horrific pain that He suffered during the Passion, and he asked the Father, "If it is your will, take this cup from me; yet not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) If God had answered this prayer differently, we would all be in trouble. If Jesus would not have endured the Passion that the Father asked of him, salvation would be lost for all mankind!

God looks for what is best for us AND for others in the scheme of things. So do not despair if suffering comes our way. Rather, pray that God help us to endure and hold tightly to him in those times.

What Kind of Love Is This?

Gift giving. We heard much about this during Christmas—we give gifts to one another, replicating the giving of the gift of the Christ Child to us in the world, and just as the Magi brought gifts for the infant Jesus.

Let this message resonate in us and among us throughout the year—especially at each Mass. We recognize that whatever we give the Lord in big and small things, he returns to us with great abundance. For example, what gifts do we offer at each Mass? We offer the simple gifts of bread and wine. Note that God is even the giver/provider of these simple gifts, and we return them to Him at the altar. And what becomes of these simple gifts? Well, we all know, they become the greatest gift—the gift of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. When we use our gifts for the good of all, may we not doubt that something great will happen because of it. God's love is everlasting.

May **FAITH** guide you when you cannot see.
May **HOPE** comfort you when you need it most.
May you **BELIEVE** at all times.

Are You Okay?

My 2-year old granddaughter is a jabber box. I don't always know what she is saying, but much of what she says is quite clear. One of her sayings if she falls or bumps herself is, "I'm okay." If I would get bumped she will ask, "Are you okay?" Perhaps we should practice these statements in our adult lives too.

Kevin Hines, at age 17, was bipolar. He was suffering from a lethal dose of emotional pain. He knew he needed help, but felt there was no one he could turn to. So there he stood on the Golden Gate Bridge some 20 years ago. As a mini bus drove by he was hoping they would notice him crying, stop and ask, "Are you okay?" Feeling no one cared at all, he let go of the bridge to the deep waters below him. He said he knew as soon as his hands left the rail, that he wanted to live. He had just wanted someone to see his pain. Vertebrae in his back were crushed from the 240 foot plummet into the water in just 4 seconds. And as he began to sink, he yelled "I need help now!" It had to be an angel from heaven, in the form of a sea lion that bumped him up and kept him up until the Coast Guard rescued him. And, by the grace of God, there was a spinal doctor on call that night to help with his back injuries.

Not only was he rescued, spared from paralysis, but he is now an advocate for people suffering from depression and other related illnesses. He reminds others that, "Your thoughts do not need to become your actions when they are negative." There is help, and there are people that want to help you. We just need to be open to it and allow them to support us during those difficult times in our lives.

Kevin is now a speaker, author and advocate for mental and behavioral health. When asked if he is religious, his answer: "I am a religious person. I've been a Catholic my whole life. The only time I lost my faith in God was when I leaped off that bridge, but I found him on the way down."

That is the way it is for many of us. We have to get totally "down and out;" we have to totally surrender and allow God to be in control. Let go and let God take the reigns. We have heard it said many times, when you are ill and lying on your back in a hospital bed, the only way you can look is up. And it is there that we recognize the presence of our Lord.

So, if you have a friend in need of help or see someone on the street that seems stand-offish, don't be afraid to stop and ask, "Are you okay?" You may be the life preserver that is needed, until they can get professional help and recognize the immense love God has for them.

Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall

I purchased a 2-sided mirror on a stand, with one side normal view; the other side magnifying everything—a lot! I only use the normal side. But today it hit me. Why don't I sometimes use the other side? I knew the answer immediately: It would show all my imperfections, and I don't want to see that?!



Lent begins soon. This is a time that we should not be hiding our imperfections. It should be about "facing them in the mirror," and then being ready to rid ourselves of them. Confession is the place for clearing up these imperfections in our soul. When we do, then we can look again more closely in the mirror and see that it has changed us for the better. We no longer need to fear what we will see. And, the only thing it will magnify is the love in our heart and the immense love that God has for us. And that is exactly what we strive for as a Christian.

Hypocrisy. What is It?

In the article above about "facing ourselves in the mirror," I admit that I am a hypocrite. What does it mean to be a hypocrite? The dictionary definition is, "a person who claims or pretends to have certain beliefs about what is right but who behaves in a way that disagrees with those beliefs."

It may sound harsh, but I believe we all have a bit of hypocrisy in us! We may question, how so? I go to Mass, I say my prayers every day, I care for my family and tend to the needs of my neighbor. So what's the problem? The problem is we are still sinners. If we were not hypocrites, we would be saints, desiring to follow Christ every minute of the day. Our thoughts, words and actions would ALWAYS match what we profess as Christians.

Let us dig deep this Lent to eliminate any hypocrisy in our lives. May we take time in the quiet, asking ourselves such things as...

Do I talk about my neighbor? Do I think poorly of someone? Am I critical of others and judgmental? Am I humble or self-righteous? Do I come to Mass, but fail to absorb the Word and prayers being said? Do I focus on Christ coming into my life when I receive Holy Communion, or have my actions become rote? Do I give to my savings account without considering charitable means? Do I hold a grudge? Am I impatient? Do I blame others for my misfortunes? Do I think I always have to be right? Do I have a tendency to correct others while failing to correct myself? Am I jealous or envious of what others have? Am I a whiner and complainer? Do I tend to put my own needs before the needs of others? Do I use my God-given talents for others? Do I accept complacency in my life, or do I try to grow closer to God each year? Do I put my own needs ahead of those for my family?

There is a long list of questions for a self examination. I suspect if we are truly honest with ourselves, that we all have room for spiritual growth. I will take the results of this self examination to the confessional this Lent. I hope you will too. God can give us the strength we need so that being a hypocrite can be a thing of our past and not our future. May God bless us all with his mercy and love this Lent.