

Sunday, November 13, 2016
EXPRESSIONS by Father Ed

Sickness and Health

Often, I talk about turning difficulties, especially illness, into a positive experience. I will have the chance to take my own advice and practice it this week. Normally, I am an optimistic person, so it will be easy to do. I am not particularly worried about the surgery – with anesthesia, I won't even know what's happening. It is the post-op recovery that concerns me. Many parishioners, however, have volunteered to pray, keep in touch, provide nursing care, and bring food. That already is encouraging. Most people, of course, are kind, especially when they know or like someone. Kindness and generosity are always easier to practice locally, where the effects are immediately visible.

I have been warned to stay at home and rest – not such a bad situation. I finally will have time to sift through the piles of reading material that have accumulated. My home will look neater. While I may be physically incapacitated, I will be stretching my mind with new ideas which I eventually will share with you. Even better, I plan on using the time as an opportunity to develop a deeper sense of gratitude and compassion, to recognize how fortunate – indeed blessed – I am, and to become more aware and sensitive to the pains and problems of others. For the whole purpose of illness is to make us better and more humane. Illness is a potential change agent, not just something to recover from as fast as possible. We don't get healed, I believe, if we merely return to the same life we had before. All struggles and problems are meant to give us insight and to deepen our understanding of life. Even though my surgery is only a small inconvenience it makes me vulnerable, but also has the capacity to make me compassionate, especially to those who have far worse sufferings. Our problems, then, can re-orient our lives and help us focus on others, instead of just ourselves.

The world needs more compassion today. One way of achieving this is to connect our own aches and pains to the sufferings of the rest of the world, to let our own situation simulate the experience of others. If we do this, our approach to refugees and immigrants, for example, might be more considerate. This has to happen, of course, on both personal and societal levels, otherwise peace, hope, and progress will always be stymied. As individuals and communities, then, we must bandage the wounds and hurts of the past and attend to the real needs of the ordinary person. To accomplish this altruism will have to replace individual and national self-interest. Many, including me, are not convinced that this is the course the current world is choosing.