

A request for prayers

By Father Joseph Breighner

One of the challenges of writing my Catholic Review column is that it is published every other week. Events that have yet transpired as I'm writing may have already happened by the time you read this column. As an old cartoon character used to say, "What a revoltin' development!"

One such issue is my health.

I've discussed in the past the strokes in my eyes in 2002 that took away a lot of my vision, and the blood clots in my lung in 2009 that nearly ended my life. Now I have a new challenge. I've not been feeling well for the past three months or so. I've cancelled a few retreats and various other commitments. It's very hard for me to do that. I love my ministry.

Then I noticed a lump in my abdomen. No, it was not cancer. In fact, it was a relatively mild diagnosis - an inguinous hernia. Could something seemingly so small have affected my nervous system? At least one medical person, who is also a psychologist, said it could. Dr. Deb King said so well: "We are influenced by the physical, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions of our lives."

Nevertheless, the procedure for removing hernias, I am told, is not a big deal. However, for me it is a big deal. You see, I'm on Coumadin, a blood thinner. So, if I agree to do the surgery, I face two challenges. First, I have to come off of Coumadin in order for the blood to thicken so that it will coagulate after the surgery - so that I won't bleed to death. On the other hand, if the blood is too thick, I face more possible blood clots to the heart or the lung - potentially fatal results.

In football, analysts regularly refer to athletes as having a "minor injury." Someone commented that a minor injury is one that happens to someone else.

Medical procedures can be classified the same way. Recently, I knew a man who went into the hospital for a "minor procedure." I visited him in the funeral home. When anesthesia and surgery are involved, there are no minor procedures. Regularly I see in the obituaries that someone died of "complications during surgery." Alas.

I share all of this, not to seek sympathy, but certainly to seek prayers. I may have already been through surgery by the time you read this column. On the other hand, I may never go through surgery. Risks and rewards are difficult to balance. In either case I still appreciate the prayers - all prayers all the time.

The deeper struggle for me is not simply fear of death. After all, we do believe in eternal life. More basically, but not excluding fear (I am human), is the desire to prolong my ministry. I've operated under some severe handicaps for more than a

decade. God has found a way where there was no way. Again and again I've been told to limit my ministry because the stress was doing such damage. Again and again I've refused. Is my body speaking louder than my mind? Is God trying to save me from myself?

The ultimate answer to all of this inner anguish is to "let go and let God." I preach and teach that, but I don't always do that. I remember how they taunted Jesus on the cross, "He saved others. Himself he cannot save!"

Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. At least I am. That's why a counselor goes to another counselor, and a doctor sees another doctor. I remember Doctor May once commenting: "A man who has himself for a doctor has a fool for a doctor!"

Hmm, those words still challenge me all these years later.

And, of course, we seek the Divine Physician. That's why again and again in prayer I have to surrender the 'I' that is 'me', to the great "I AM" that is so much more.