

Life not going your way? Trust God

Since I'm incredibly disorganized, I'll probably never get around to doing it. But if I could chisel my "last sermon" on my tombstone, what I would have printed would be: "Focus on the good. An attitude of gratitude. Trust God." Those three sentences capture the essence of a happy life.

None of us can control what happens to us, or around us, in life. But we can control what we choose to focus on. Whatever we focus on will expand. If we focus on what's wrong, we will see more of what's wrong. If we focus on what's right, we'll see more of what's right. Life, fundamentally, is a choice, a decision, to look for the best and to be our best.

All of us have much to be grateful for. If all of us could tell our life stories there would be enough sadness to reduce all of us to tears. None of us is immune to the pain of life. But despite all the tragedy and misery that are a part of life, all of us have so much more to be grateful for. As a sign outside of a church read: "If you think you have nothing to thank God for, try checking your pulse." Just to have had a chance to live is enough to be grateful for.

Appropriately, November, the month of praying for the faithful departed, ends with Thanksgiving, a day to say thanks. Allow me to share a personal story from childhood to tie them together.

When I was in the first grade at Our Lady of Mount Carmel grade school, I was diagnosed with poor vision and had to wear glasses. In the 1950s wearing glasses was not a cool thing! Naturally, those first days at school were a time of much teasing and taunting. I was one forlorn first-grader. In my state of feeling awful about myself, I happened to walk past a group of girls in my class, and I overheard one of them, Patricia Sopko, saying to the rest her friends: "My mother said we shouldn't pick on Joey Breighner because he has to wear glasses!" In that moment, it was as if the skies opened, and I had a vision of heaven, with angels and saints ascending and descending! Someone had said a kind word. There was light in the darkness!

Mary Sopko died this past October. I went to the funeral home to pay my respects and to say a few prayers. I had to say thanks.

Sometimes we think the little things don't matter. I'm here to tell you again that they do. One kind sentence was still alive and well in my mind 57 years later! So was the gratitude!

Mother Teresa got it right when she said: "Most of us are not called to do great things. We are called to do small things with great love." Say the right thing. Do the kind thing. Be grateful for those little things.

Finally, trust God. As this month comes to an end, we suddenly find ourselves at a new beginning. This weekend the season of Advent begins – the beginning of the church's new liturgical year.

Life is a series of endings and beginnings. There is a cycle to life. Always the changing of seasons and the changing of times, remind us of the unchanging God, a God who never tires of loving us.

Always and forever there are challenges for all of us: ill health, loss of jobs, worries over relatives, and separations from and the deaths of loved ones. When faced with things we can't understand or figure out, I tell myself, and I tell others, the same thing: "Put it on God's list. And trust!"

Ultimately, trust is all that any of us have. None of us breathed ourselves into existence. None of us controls history. None of us can conquer death. But God can do all of those things. Focus on the good. Practice gratitude. Trust God!