

# Make Thanksgiving a way of life

Recently, I lead a Day of Recollection on “Living Our Best Life” at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville. Since it was a rainy day, I left really early and arrived really early – 7:30 a.m. for a day that began at 10 a.m. However, God, as always, had a surprise for me.

As I’ve said so often, “Coincidence is when God chooses to remain anonymous”. So, by coincidence, as I walked past the dining room, out walked Father John Lobell.

John is an Episcopal Priest. We were colleagues on the staff of the Pastoral Counseling and Consultation Centers of Greater Baltimore many years ago. Meeting John felt like a gift from God. It was.

John has been a part of many programs offered at Bon Secours. He has a spiritual director. He has been trained in the Ignatian Exercises. He has learned to be still and listen to God.

Without violating any confidences, John said two things that were remarkably wonderful. He said: “Joe, I’ve been a perfectionist all my life. I’ve always given myself a hard time. But in all my conversations with God, God has never once given me a hard time”. John writes a letter to Jesus every morning. He then pauses in silence, and then allows God to write a letter back to him. Amazing wisdom has come out of these dialogues. I haven’t done that, but I would recommend that. But, just to be safe, have a spiritual director you can talk to.

John said something else that deeply touched me. John is around 80 years of age ( I think!). As a result of his days of retreat and time in prayer, he said that today he “feels mostly gratitude and joy”.

Wow, what a gift! Most of us think of Thanksgiving as a day. John thinks of thanksgiving as a way of life. I think John has discovered how God intended us to live.

Life has dramas of various kinds. But isn’t it wonderful that you and I got a chance at life? How could we not be grateful?

And, yes, life is filled with challenges and losses and tragedies of various kinds. But beneath it all, isn't it wonderful to know, as St. Paul, knew, that nothing can separate us from the love of God?

I tell Father Lobell's story because it is the story of Bon Secours. There are dozens of groups that meet there. There are countless people who participate in various programs. But conversion of heart comes one heart at a time.

Dr. Tom Little, the executive director, has remodeled the structure and rebuilt the spirit. He even sells my books in the bookstore. Among numerous activities, Dr. Little leads a support group on the second Friday of every month for those who have lost jobs.

Tom, himself, is a cancer survivor. He sees the Spiritual Center as his ministry. In fact, he sees retreat houses in general as a vital means of renewing the church. Isn't that what we ask for when we ask the Holy Spirit to "renew the face of the earth"?

On various occasions, I have worked with Lynn Lieberman and Amy Kulesa, wonderful people. I have found the whole staff to be helpful and hospitable at all times.

And did I mention that the food is out of this world? An army may march on its stomach. So do retreatants! When people ask how they can book me for a talk or retreat, I usually respond: "If you feed me, I will come". If you feed me too well, I may not leave!

If you are interested in any of their programs you can go on line, or simply call their main number 410-442-1320. Your retreat won't last forever, but the benefits will!