

Take charge of your attitude

In the midst of the intense heat in mid-July I heard a line that reflected both good advice for coping with the heat, as well as good advice for coping with life. Allow me to give some background.

I know a wonderful woman. She does not own a car. She walks miles to get to work each day. Once at work, she spends most of her time standing. She refuses offers for rides. So, in the midst of the hot days, I asked her how she was coping with the heat. She replied very quietly: "I stay in the shade and walk more slowly." What?

She might have said: "Oh, I'm having a terrible time. I don't have a car. I have to walk up these steep hills. I think I might get sick from all this heat. I arrive at work drenched with perspiration. It's just been a terrible summer." Instead she just said that she stayed in the shade and walked more slowly.

Obviously, logically, you can argue that you can't always walk in the shade. Sometimes there is no shade! Sometimes just walking slowly just keeps you in the heat longer!

But she wasn't speaking logically. She was speaking theologically. She has great personal devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. No doubt, in her mind, she thought her discomfort slight compared to the Blessed Mother as she watched her Son being rejected by the religious leaders and crucified by the civil authorities. I think this remarkable woman was simply offering up her own pain in union with Mary's pain. The saints do still live among us.

To put it another way, this lady couldn't change the weather so she changed her attitude toward the weather. Instead of focusing on the heat, she focused on the shade. Instead of dwelling on what she could not control, she emphasized what she could control - the pace of her walking.

Please understand that I'm not suggesting that anyone should put their health at risk imitating her behavior. I'm suggesting imitating her attitude.

I don't pretend to be as holy as this wonderful person. I suffer in the heat. I don't

perspire, I sweat! The thought of high heat for all eternity helps to adjust my spiritual radar when thoughts of heaven aren't enough!

However, I have adopted something of her attitude. In the midst of the heat in June, I drove eight hours to give a retreat at the Dominican Retreat House in Niskayuna, New York. It's near Albany. As I arrived hot and tired, Sister told me that my apartment had no air conditioning! I reacted calmly: "NO! I'm going to die!," I thought to myself.

But then I caught myself and said: "I can put an intention on the week and make myself miserable. Or I can put an intention on the week to decide to enjoy the week." I decided to enjoy the week. Almost immediately Sister brought a fan that blew cool air from the air-conditioned chapel into my room. When I stopped focusing on what was wrong, I allowed good things to happen. I stopped focusing on what I could not change, the weather, and decided to focus on what I could change, my attitude.

Allow me to close with a reflection on attitude that I often share on retreats. It was written by Charles Swindoll:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what other people think, or do, or say. It is more important than appearances, giftedness, or skill. It will make or break a company, a church, a home. The remarkable thing is, we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. The only thing we do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me, and 90 percent how I react to it. And so it is with you. We are in charge of our attitudes."