

Trust in One who is always there

When I had finished speaking at a Communion Breakfast recently, a woman came up to me and said, “Father. Joe, I have been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. My doctor gave me three weeks to live!” She paused and then added, “It’s been six years since that diagnosis and I’m still alive!”

Little miracles happen all the time. We need to notice them. This lady has had the best of modern medical treatment, as well as a deep faith in God. Her whole stomach has been removed.

During all this time, the woman has maintained a sense of trust in God. It all resulted from a moment in prayer when she quite distinctly heard a voice that said: “Life is not always fair, but I am always there!” She believed it was the voice of God.

From our limited human perspective, life does indeed seem unfair many times. Good people do suffer. Wonderful people seem to get terrible diseases. Even our pets can have bad things happen to them. When the world seems like it’s falling apart, we are more aware of God’s absence than of His presence.

Yet, if we trust that God “is always there,” we can face the same challenges with a different sense of peace. The great Bishop Fulton Sheen once used the image of life as a giant, hand-woven rug. On the back side of the rug, we see all the loose ends. It looks like a mess. Yet, when we turn the rug over, we see a beautiful pattern.

In this limited time-space reality that we live in, we see the backside of the rug of life. It often looks like a mess. Yet, our trust is that God does “write straight with crooked lines.”

All the mystics tell us that everything is fine. Those who have had some kind of mystical experience of God, who have seen life through the eyes of God, assure us that all is well. Even while it’s all falling apart, all is well. That’s quite an act of faith. Perhaps Julian of Norwich said it best: “All will be well, and all will be well, and all manner of things will be well.”

As I have said before, there is only one reason why we are unhappy – we want what

we do not have. We want a spouse back, or our health back, or a job back, or our money back, and on and on. Any loss requires time to mourn the loss. We need to pass through the stages of anger and sadness and bargaining and denial, and, finally, acceptance. Grief is a process and we have to honor the process. We will grieve at our own pace.

The source of happiness is gratitude for what we do have. I think that was the source the lady tapped into. She grieved the cancer. She grieved the potential loss of her life. She faced the unfairness of life. Yet, she experienced profound joy in being grateful for what she did have. She still had the presence of God.

The miracle of life is what we can all be grateful for. And by living in gratitude, we can make the most difficult times joyful, if not happy. Allow me to close with a quote from Jane Canfield:

“The happiest people are rarely the richest, the most beautiful, or even the most talented. Happy people do not depend on excitement and ‘fun’ supplied by externals. They enjoy the simple things of life. They waste no time thinking other pastures are greener; they do not yearn for yesterday or tomorrow.

“They savor the moment, glad to be alive, enjoying their work, their families, the good things around them. They are adaptable; they can bend with the wind, adjust to the changes in their times, employ the contests of life, and feel themselves in harmony with the world.

“Their eyes are turned outward, they are aware, compassionate. They have the capacity to love!”