

Years surrounded by God

On the first day of March, an interesting thing will happen to me. I will turn 73 years of age. I share that because I never thought I would live to see it.

My mother died in 1983 at the age of 72, and I thought I would probably die at the same age. This has not been any kind of morbid curiosity for me. I was just guessing.

How long should we live? In the Old Testament, there is the line: "Seventy is the sum of our years, or eighty if we are strong." Life expectancy was very short in Biblical times. Seventy or 80 years would indeed have been a long life.

Today life expectancy, at least in the Western Hemisphere, is longer than ever. Because of clean drinking water, an abundance of food and good medical care, people are living into their 90s and even into their 100s. Many of us experience what Cardinal Lawrence Shehan's memoir called "A Blessing of Years." Yet, I recall those various times when he would celebrate a birthday at St. Mary's Seminary, which he would invariably end by saying: "Pray that there won't be many more of these."

At the same time, too many young people die of disease, accidents or violence. Few things are sadder than the death of a young person.

So how do we understand life? A person currently dying of cancer said it so well and so simply: "Each day of life really is a gift." We say those words so easily. They're not always easy to live.

President Lincoln was once asked how tall a man should be. He responded by saying: "A man's legs should be long enough to reach the ground."

Perhaps we might paraphrase that and say: "A person's life should be long enough to reach God."

Obviously, not every person does grow up to have an opportunity to articulate a faith in God. But I believe that from the first moment of conception, God has faith in us. Our lives matter in time and eternity to God. "I have loved you with an everlasting love. I love you and you are mine." We never cease belonging to God.

We are surrounded by oxygen, even though we can't feel it or see it. It keeps us alive. We are surrounded by God even though we can't always feel or see God. God keeps us alive. I'm glad that I've lived long enough to share God with you.