



UP FRONT AND PERSONAL
**A Lesson Learned
 While Recovering**
 BY ROGER PAYNE

Judging by the number of folks who have shared good wishes with me at parish events and in correspondence, many of you have been following the soap opera of my battle with brain cancer and its religious and real-world implications.

Well, there is good news. If, as I said in my first column on this topic, "You have a brain tumor" from the neurosurgeon sounded like a death sentence in January, "You are in remission" from the neuro-oncologist in May created a sense of relief like a last-minute reprieve from the warden. When he described last week's two-month checkup MRI as "as good as it gets," my family and I breathed a sigh of relief.

There was a feeling of at least temporary closure, that family members and everyone around me could get back to business, since for the moment, at least, my case was closed, and I was OK. And that's true: I'm officially classified as a cancer survivor at this time and I'm cancer-free until and unless a future check-up shows I'm not.

The rejoicing! The happiness! The celebration! The battle was over and everything was back to normal, right? Ha. What fools we mortals be! To paraphrase the old saying, we assume, God laughs.

I learned I was in remission on a Tuesday. The next day, Wednesday, I flew to New Orleans with wife Nancy and son Rory to take a look at Loyola of New Orleans, the college Rory has since decided to attend. We spent a pleasant Wednesday exploring New Orleans, then dropped Rory off at the campus to spend the night with some of the students.

Suddenly, I was flat on my back, exhausted, and next thing I knew, I was in the emergency room at Tulane Hospital. All I could think was, hey, no fair! You docs said I was in remission, now what? I was mightily ticked off. I had sailed through radiation treatments and chemotherapy with head held high and a very positive attitude, and now this!

Funny how easily a positive attitude in the face of bad news can turn into the arrogance of thinking you're in control of your fate when the news turns good again. All of a sudden, with the remission announcement, I had reverted to the illusion that I was in control. Pretty ungrateful turn of mindset for a guy who had gone through radiation and the initial chemo treatments saying, OK, God, whatever you want, I'll go with it.

Mind you, I've since learned that a very typical reaction to learning you're in remission is clinical depression. For while remission sounds like an end, there's a lot of recuperation needed afterwards, without the benefit of any immediate target; you're just hoping to be, as Chicago once sang, "feelin' stronger every day." Would that the process would be so linear; in real life every day is a new adventure and a new assessment of how things are. Your body, being beaten to a pulp for months to gain victory over the cancer, is not only weakened, but continues to generate "fight or flight" hormones with no concrete opponent in sight.

So there are bio-chemical reasons for post-remission depression. But it's also clear in retrospect that it took root only because I stubbornly tried once again to impose my will on reality rather than doing my best within the flow God had in mind for me.

As for New Orleans, it turned out that, no matter how much I enjoyed the music pouring out of every doorway, I had overstayed my welcome. As a diabetic with lowered resistance, I had become dehydrated strolling the hot, humid streets of the French Quarter. The doctors termed that "good news," since it wasn't a cancerous recurrence, but because of the timing, it sure took me awhile to see it their way.

Perhaps that was God's plan. Perhaps He allowed the dehydration episode to happen immediately to remind me how vulnerable I continue to be as a diabetic cancer survivor in particular, and as a human being in general. After all, nobody's health is guaranteed. Perhaps this was His way of clearly sending an important message: there's never a good time to get cocky.

Lesson learned - and now I feel much better, thanks.

Roger Payne, a member of The Tablet's editorial staff, is a parishioner at St. Joan of Arc, Jackson Heights.

Charges Against Priest Found to Be Credible

Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio has announced that allegations of sexual misconduct with minors made against a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn were found to be credible.

In separate letters concerning Father Joseph P. Byrns read at the Masses last weekend (June 26-27) in St. Rose of Lima Church, Parkville, and St. Anastasia's Church, Douglaston, the bishop said he based his announcement on investigations conducted by the Queens District Attorney's Office and the Diocesan Review Board.

Father Byrns had served in both parishes, recently as pastor at St. Rose of Lima, and after ordination in 1969 as a parochial vicar at St. Anastasia's.

Two brothers, Robert and Father Timothy Lambert, said that as youths living in the Douglaston parish they were abused by Father Byrns. They presented the allegations to the diocese.

"The diocesan representatives who listened to the charges took them seriously," Bishop DiMarzio wrote in his letter to St. Anastasia's parishioners. "Father Byrns, in his own defense, insisted, emphatically and repeatedly, that the charges were false. At the same time, the persons who made the claims were equally insistent about the truthfulness of their allegations. The diocesan representatives, after examining the matter over an extended period of time, found it extremely difficult to determine where the truth lay in a complex matter."

The bishop said that when the district attorney's report was received, the diocese, then headed by now-retired Bishop Thomas V. Daily, placed Father Byrns on administrative leave, "meaning that he was not permitted to function publicly as a priest," but could celebrate Mass privately.

Bishop DiMarzio gave the case to the Diocesan Review Board, formed in compliance with the U.S. Bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" and the accompanying norms. The board, after an investigation by a former police department sex crimes expert and following its own review, concluded that the claims were credible.

"I accepted the board's report and met with Father Byrns, advising him that he would not be permitted to return to active priestly ministry," the bishop said.

Both letters noted that documentation on the case was sent to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in accordance with canon law.

The steps the diocese has taken "have been essential to maintaining our commitment to carrying out the mandates" of the bishops' charter and the accompanying norms, he said.

Bishop DiMarzio said he wanted to use the occasion of his announcement to apologize publicly again to victims of clergy sexual abuse and to their families.

The bishop's letter to St. Anastasia's parishioners reached out "to others in the parish who say they were victims, and/or their families," asking them to "let

us know" of instances of inappropriate sexual behavior with minors by clergy.

"As representatives of Christ's healing Church, we wish to serve anyone who has suffered because of such abuse," he said.

For abuse victims, he added, "even the passage of time has not eased the pain."

In his letter to the congregation at St. Rose of Lima, Bishop DiMarzio acknowledged that "for more than two years, your community of the faithful... has endured the trial" of knowing about the accusations against Father Byrns.

As loyal parishioners, he said, "you surely comforted him with your expressions of support."

Bishop DiMarzio expressed gratitude to Father Fred Marano, the administrator; Josephite Sister Maureen Sullivan, the pastoral associate, and others on the parish staff for their "commitment to the spiritual well-being of all members of the parish community."

He urged parishioners of St. Rose of Lima and St. Anastasia's to remain firm in their faith in "a challenging time for our Church."

In the letter read at the Parkville church, Bishop DiMarzio said: "As a Diocese, we remain committed to protecting all children and young people in every way."

Several members of the newly established Diocesan Healing Team were on hand at the two parishes after the weekend Masses to speak with parishioners concerned about the announcement.

Dominican Sister Ellen Patricia Finn, diocesan Victim/Survivor Coordinator, led the group at St. Anastasia's, assisted by Georgeann Campbell, Joseph Doss and Alfred Wassler.

At St. Rose of Lima, Josephite Sister Patricia Hudson, diocesan Safe Environment Coordinator, was assisted by Beverly Madar and Timothy McBride.

Both groups were also scheduled to be available for parishioners at the respective parishes one evening in the week following the announcement.

Sister Ellen Patricia coordinates the work of the healing team, whose 20 members, many of them experienced counselors, include eight lay persons, seven priests, three Permanent Deacons and two women Religious.

New Auxiliary Bishops For Archdiocese

WASHINGTON (CNS) - Pope John Paul II has appointed two new auxiliary bishops for the Archdiocese of New York.

Msgr. Gerald T. Walsh, pastor of St. Elizabeth parish in Manhattan, and Msgr. Dennis J. Sullivan, pastor of St. John and Paul parish in Larchmont, were named as auxiliaries. They are both priests of the New York Archdiocese.

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