



The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop
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May the Lord Give you Peace!

By Fr Chuck Faso, OFM (www.frchuckofm.org)

The Month of November brings us the feasts of All Saints Day on November 1st, All Souls Day on November 2nd, and our National Thanksgiving Day on November 24th. We celebrate who we will be on the other side of death as well as how we are to prepare for life everlasting. For these blessings and all the many gifts in our lives, "Let us give Thanks to the Lord our God!"



All Saints

Life's goal of everlasting life shines brightly in our Heroes, in our Saints – both "our He-roes and our She-roes," as I heard at Notre Dame Church in Clarendon Hills IL in 1974. The Saints were people like us who gave themselves to a life of love and service of God and others. Some Saints are truly extraordinary in what they did and how they lived. Most saints are the ordinary folks like us and our families and friends – good people who did what they could do in the best way they could do it. We all have our quirks and irritating ways, our weaknesses and our sinfulness. St Jerome, who translated the Bible for the first time from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, had a ferocious, fiery temper.

You would never want to get St Jerome angry. That was his wound, his challenge, his graced-area of becoming a saint with God's Grace. We all have our wounds and sinfulness. Some saints lived in solitude, others in the middle of every day family life. Saints are those who when they fall, they always get up and continue on the journey.



Some were monks and others were married. Some were old when they died and others were young. Blessed Pope John Paul II canonized four hundred and eighty-two saints in his 25 years as Pope - more than all the popes in the previous five hundred years. Why? To show the church and the world that every person is called to be a Saint and can become Saints by embracing God's love and grace that is available to us all. Be a Saint! Be Holy! Be a wild and passionate Lover of God and others!

Question: Who are the saints who inspire you? Whom do you consider to be a Saint? Why? What qualities in others touch you? What can you do to become a saint? Do you want to become a saint?

All Souls

All Souls day reminds us and challenges us to rid ourselves of all that clogs up our hearts and minds that is not of God – hatred and jealousy, selfishness and indifference, prejudice and violence.

Our prayers reach out across the valley of death to assist the beloved dead as they continue on their journey to the full embrace of God's love. God's mercy is plentiful and available for each of us here and now and on the other side of death. God's "hesed" (Hebrew), God's loving kindness and mercy await us each moment of our journey. That Peace that we all desire to rejoice in forever is ours for the asking. We pray that all of our beloved Dead open their hearts to God's Hesed – our prayers help them open their hearts to receive God's love which frees and heals them. Our faith gives birth to hope which in turn enables us to love, forever!



Question: What values, attitudes, actions of ours need to be purified, changed, or let go of now? (If you do know, ask a friend or ask someone you live with. They might have a few suggestions how you could change.)

Thanksgiving Day

Another feast day of November is Thanksgiving Day! Our National Day of recognizing that we are truly a blessed nation. We are blessed by God who has shaped this land, peopled this land with Native Americans, and called our ancestors to these shores to establish a land of liberty and justice for all. We are still birthing God's Dream for all who live within our borders. We give thanks to a generous God, for all is gift.



There is responsibility in accepting gifts, especially gifts that are to be shared with all men and women, old and young, of every race and

background. Thanksgiving Day offers us the opportunity to say yes to sharing all gifts with all of God's people. "Let us give Thanks to the Lord our God." Of course, Turkey and Dressing, Sweet Potatoes and Pumpkin Pie, help us remember how gifted and blessed we are. Then we can say: "We are too blessed to be stressed!" If we are stressed, perhaps it is because we have forgotten our blessings! The fourth Thursday in November offers us an opportunity to remember how blessed we all are. Thank you, loving God, for everything!

Question: For what ten blessings in your life are you most grateful? Write them down. Keep them under your pillow, on your mirror, on your desk.....and tell your spouse and children, tell your family and friends. Okay, you do not have to limit the list to only ten blessings for which you are particularly grateful. Maybe a hundred and ten!



"It is what it is!" – so says Polly

As I write this November Legionnaire, I am sitting in the ICU Waiting Room at Franciscan St James Hospital in Chicago Heights, IL. My younger sister Polly is fighting for her life. For some twenty years Polly has proven to be a valiant woman in accepting and battling her illnesses of high blood pressure and kidney failure, of diabetes and gout. Polly is always cheerful, thinking of others, remembering birthdays and anniversaries of our large family and many friends. Polly learned well to cook delicious meals from Grandma Helsel and from our mother. Polly's skills for baking developed well over the years.

On October 17, 2011, Polly phoned me at 6:30 AM. I struggled out of my blankets to find the source of the ringing (I had been sick all night with the flu). Polly's voice was filled with pain and fright. Her legs and body would not move. Already Polly had called a friend for help. In a matter of minutes the Ambulance took Polly to the hospital.

Polly had experienced this loss of muscle control a few times in the past five years. Our suspicions were correct: Polly was again experiencing the results of too much potassium in her body. Normal potassium level for a human being is between 3.5 to 4.5. Potassium Level of 7 to 8 is fatal. Polly's potassium level was 9.8. The doctors all said that it was a miracle that Polly was still alive in the Emergency Room.

What have we been learning about potassium?

One of the wonders that enable our bodies to function is potassium. Too much potassium in your body as well as not enough potassium can be fatal. So what is potassium? Potassium is a major and very important component of our bodies' minerals. There is a very long list of functions that are orchestrated by potassium, such as the heart's rhythm, nerve activity, collagen formation, production of elastin, acid balance, regulation of blood pressure, preservation of bone mass, and proper functioning of the lungs and kidneys. Generally, if you consume fresh vegetables, milk, fruits and fish you should be able to provide your body with an adequate amount of potassium. It is very important that the levels of potassium stay optimal as a person can develop

major health hazards when the levels fall or rise. Having too much potassium, is known as hyperkalemia. Excess potassium suspends the function of electrical impulses in the body, which causes the heart to stop.

For most of us with good kidney function, there is no problem. Our kidneys remove excess potassium. Polly, like many people, suffers from kidney failure and needs dialysis three times a week for four hours each session. The dialysis machine that purifies the body's blood of impurities does not come close to what our normal kidneys can accomplish. So potassium can build up in our blood and tissues. Then our muscles including our hearts cease to function.

Ten minutes after Polly arrived at the Emergency Room, she suffered a cardiac arrest. Cardiac arrest is the cessation of normal circulation of the blood due to failure of the heart to contract effectively. The heart stops. A cardiac arrest is different from (but may be caused by) a heart attack, where blood flow to the muscle of the heart is impaired.

Through these last five years, Polly has been on dialysis and has suffered greatly with constant pain from severe gout, arthritis, a failed kidney transplant, etc. Through all of this, Polly often has said: *"It is what it is!"* And she means every word. You would never know how Polly was feeling unless you asked her. Polly does not complain about her aches and pains. She is always interested in how everyone else was feeling. For birthdays of family and friends Polly sent flowers and cards and called on the phone. Polly thought about others before herself.



The question for many of us comes up again: Why do bad things happen to good people? Rabbi Kushner in 1981 attempted to answer this question. So I too struggle personally with this question. Why should Polly suffer so very much for so many years – Polly who has a heart of love and thoughtfulness for others. Polly prayed everyday and trusted God. Many of you have probably been confronted with

this same question as you stand at the bed of a suffering loved one. Why?

My only way of understanding this part of our human journey is this: If I get cancer or whatever else it will be, I hope I remember that I could get cancer because I am a human being. If I were a rock, I would not get cancer or heart disease. Disease and sickness does not happen because God is punishing me or looking away or..... The Good News is that God is with me through this part of my journey of life, that God is my strength and comfort, that Jesus on his Cross empowers me to say yes to my cross and to join my suffering with his. I am not alone in this journey of pain and loss of health and life. The journey of life is about letting go and saying yes to the next chapter, whatever it might be. Ah for the Grace to say yes with all my heart, as Polly says: *"It is what it is!"* and to say this with trust and resignation, with hope in God who loves me and is present with me every moment of my living, suffering, dying and being born into eternal life.

So now to see my younger sister helpless in a bed in ICU (Intensive Care Unit) with a ventilator and a multitude of tubes and wires while bags of fluids empty into her body – My mind says: This is not happening to Polly! *"It is what it is!"* For Polly not to be able speak and smile, to laugh and share in conversation because of the ventilator in her mouth and throat to bring oxygen to her lungs – unimaginable! *"It is what it is!"* The doctors do not know whether Polly will live through this or not. Please remember Polly in prayer. I will remember all of your families in my prayer.

So many of you reading these pages have experienced this same situation with loved ones – so helpless to relieve the pain or change the discomfort of a family member in pain. *"It is what it is!"* Those few words express so much hope and acceptance, so much trust and letting go, of placing the journey into the loving hands of God. Jesus showed us how to stay in the struggle of trusting God until you can say as Jesus did: *"Into your hands I commend my spirit."*



