



From the Pastor's Desk

As I look back over past columns, I realize that it has been quite a while since I last updated you on my cancer fight. In fact it's been eleven months. I know I've told those who ask a little bit now and then but I feel I need to tell my entire parish family some of the details. It's been a rough year with ups, downs and some real lows. When I last wrote to you, things were looking up but I ended the column that there might be a black cloud on the horizon. Well, there was. The medication that I was on as of last July started slowly losing its effect. At first, doctors were hoping that it was a simple fluctuation in the numbers. Unfortunately, I knew better because of the way I was feeling. The drug was declared "failing" at the beginning of November. After stopping the drug, I had to wait for it to leave my systems. This lasted until the 1st of January.

In early January, scans and tests were done. The phrase "you're only as good as your next test" came to haunt me. I could feel things were not right and they were not. I knew when my doctor called only an hour after I got home and she used the phrase "Hi, do you have time to talk?" that things were not good. The scans showed new tumors and some growth. Needless to say, I was not in a good mood even if I looked good. Doctor Gaynor was wonderful. She told me that she would be upset too if these were her scans BUT if she put her doctor hat on that this was not the end of the world. She continued on saying that we expected some growth because of the failing drug and that these new tumors were small. Lastly, we were changing medications and that should help.

With the coming of the New Year, I was placed a brand new drug that was just approved for general use by the FDA in October. The good news was my doctor had been using this drug experimentally for five years before this. Starting on this chemo drug required taking a steroid drug called prednisone. This steroid has a lot of side effects (some weird). I have come to call this drug "the devil pill" because of some of the side effects. Finding out what side effects I would have was an adventure.

The most public side effect occurs during some Masses and other unpredictable times (it's happened in stores, during meetings, conversations, etc.) What you may have observed is one minute I seem full of energy and then a sudden "crash" where I quickly become tired, light headed and even flush. I then have to sit down. This so called "crash" has a warning sign. I get a huge hot flash and sweat like crazy. (Doctor Gaynor joked that "now I know how women feel.") It then takes a while for me to recover. Recovery is easy; I have simply to rest and chill. The amount of recovery time varies but it can be hours. This means I generally can only handle one big Mass a day. I have found that Gatorade can delay the oncoming crash (you may have seen me drinking it during Holy Thursday, Easter Vigil, First Communion and Graduation) but it too comes with a cost. If I drink Gatorade to slow the oncoming crash, my recovery time is much greater. So, I try not to use it on a regular basis. Other side effects from the many drugs I have to take include my old favorite.....fatigue. I also can get "flu like" muscle aches and symptoms after a certain injection.

So, after all these things how am I doing? Is it worth it? My answer as of today is ... Yes! My last round of tests and scans in June were showing no new tumors and no growth. This new chemo drug is working. I am a little uneasy saying things are good because it can all change with the pinch of the blood draw needle. As of right now, putting up with the side effects and all the rest is worth it.

In conclusion, what I ask is not sympathy but understanding. Please understand I try to do all I can. I may not make everything and I may not always be standing in back of church. We have an excellent staff that can cover all the bases well. We are very blessed here at St. Monica. Lastly keep praying for me, Cardinal George and everyone who is fighting cancer. Each fight is unique even if it's the same enemy and same cancer. Keep all cancer survivors in your prayers. Each of us fighting cancer knows all too well the phrase: "You're only as good as your next test."

Thank you for your prayers.

Fr. Fred Tomzik