

Reflection from Fr. Philip O'Shea, OFM

Holy Name Friary

December 2016

I thought I'd send you a few thoughts at Christmas time on the joyful gift of being bedridden. "Oh!" you say in horror, "How can you associate joy with being an invalid?" In the almost 18 months that I have been away from Boston, I have had a good deal of time to meditate on the meaning of this radical change in my way of life.

The first point I want to make is that opportunity is given in abundance for real contemplation on who one is and how one is to live. I cannot recommend too highly the need throughout our lives to consider our innate ability to adjust. We must give ourselves many examples of how we adjust to little things so that when the time comes, we are able to make even greater adjustments. The words which must guide us are from the Epistle to the Romans (chapter 8): "If God be with us who (or what) can be against us." Becoming increasingly less able to function completely, we must learn to function with what we have. We must not let the memory of our days of greater capacity interfere with our resolution to positively adjust to new situations. We must look at every change, however radical, as a challenge. We have not changed, even though our external capacity has lessened.

While we are still greatly able to do the things our life requires, we must be, at the same time, willing through meditation to see how completely we remain ourselves as situations develop. We have to come to realize that we cannot define ourselves by what we are able to do. Rather, we must learn to discover our real identity and with that knowledge, come to face any necessary adjustments.

I have learned over these past few months how to develop qualities of mind and spirit of which I was not really aware when I was at full capacity. Examination of conscience, so important to the growth of the spiritual life becomes new — not a brief and occasional review of my sins, but rather a review of my history.

If we did not keep one before, a journal at this stage of life becomes a necessary tool for more perfect understanding and adjustment to our situation.

My writing about these matters to you in this Christmas season is to share with you the increasing happiness I am constantly discovering in myself and in my surroundings, and to assure you that you can experience a realization of the possibility for this happiness for yourself and a deep sense of how change in its many forms, when looked at positively, becomes a companion to growth.

Please look the future in the face and, confident of God's presence, his love, and his direction, look forward, not to the lessening of capacity, but to the increase of the ability to deal with whatever may come along. I want to share with you my own deep peace of

mind and to assure you that you may never lose this gift so long as you see things through God's eyes.

A very Merry Christmas from a very happy man.

God love you all,

Fr. Philip O'Shea, OFM