

Tenth Day of Christmas - January 3, 2022

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I was home for Christmas! Praise the Lord! A wonderful time of celebration with friends and family, worship with the intrepid saints of Grace Anglican Church, and I even delivered a homily on the Fourth Sunday in Advent.
- After a long conversation with the oncologist, and later with the head of the Bone Marrow Transplant Team, I began the preliminary process for a stem cell transplant. I gave many vials of blood on December 11, to do human leukocyte antigen typing, as a first step in searching for a compatible stem cell donor.
- Late last week, I learned that the donor registry reported “several donors” that match me! The transplant team has reached out to three of these to verify that they are a satisfactory match.
- Once **two** donors are identified, the next steps in preparation for a stem cell transplant will proceed.

WHAT IS A STEM CELL TRANSPLANT?

Many immune-system cancers, including mine, originate in the bone marrow which is a kind of “factory” for many different cells in our blood - red blood cells, white cells, platelets, and many others. When things go wrong in the bone marrow, one of these cells can begin to grow in a wild fashion. Most chemotherapies try to suppress this wild growth; and, sometimes it succeeds.

But, what if the patient's bone marrow keeps on producing these wild cells? A drastic solution is to totally eliminate the patient's bone marrow! Once the defective “blood factory” is destroyed, an entirely new blood factory is transplanted into the patient from a donor - just like a heart transplant replaces a defective heart, or a kidney transplant replaces a failing kidney.

In a bone marrow transplant, the patient's bone marrow is purposefully “removed” by a very toxic chemotherapy that kills off not only the bone marrow but also any remaining cancer cells that may lurk undetected in the patient's body. Then stem cells from a living donor are infused into the patient much like any ordinary blood transfusion.

The donated stem cells find their way into the patient's bones where they set up a new “factory” that begins to generate new red cells, new white cells, and other normal parts of our blood. Once this factory is mature, the patient is (hopefully) cured from his blood cancer.

As you might guess, this therapy is drastic, arduous, and complicated. Over the coming months, I'll explain the process as I move through its stages.

THE FIRST STAGE OF A STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

The first stage is to find a donor. Living volunteer donors have already had their own immune

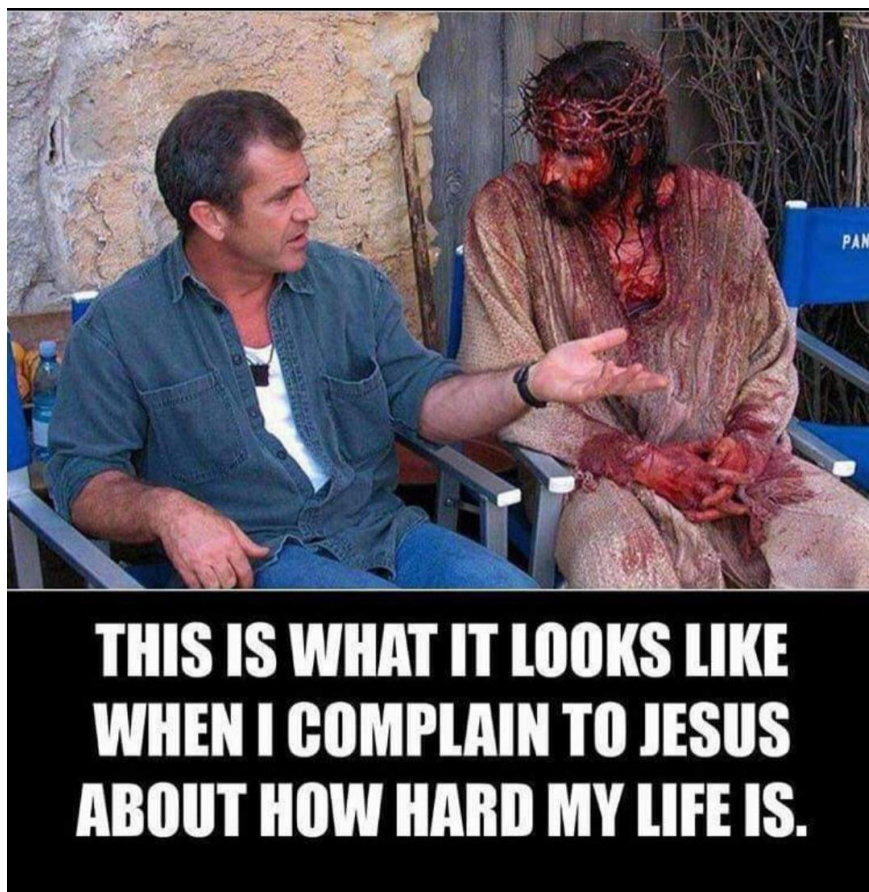
systems, and have registered the results with [a database of potential donors](#). Evidently the donor registry reports several matching donors (I don't know how many). The transplant team at UT Southwestern tells me that they are requesting blood samples from three of these donors to learn (1) if they are still willing to donate some of their stem cells, and (2) if their stem cells are indeed compatible with my own.

Why **two** donors? If the preparation for a transplant begins and a potential donor drops out, much work and medical assets might be wasted. So, all that complicated scheduling, testing, and coordination does not begin until two donors are identified who are a good match with my own immune-system.

Please pray that the matching process will proceed as promptly and accurately as possible. Once two donors are **verified**, the next steps in the process for a stem cell transplant will proceed, and I'll explain each step as it occurs.

AN UNEXPECTED LESSON FROM THAT MEME

In a previous update, I mentioned a particular meme that has greatly encouraged me. Here it is again. Take a look at it before reading further about why it is so encouraging to me.



He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

The Point: if our Lord has suffered for us as much as He did, do we think He will be denied the fulfillment of the purpose for which he died? Having paid so high a price to rescue us, will He stop short of our final conformity to His image?

The secret hidden in that photo is this: it calls to mind all that our Lord suffered, and the photo juxtaposes our Lord with one of those for whom He suffered and died, epitomized by Mel Gibson in his casual pose that seems to ignore the monumental divine effort expended for his sake.

No, our Lord will not have died in vain when He died for us. For all the silliness we're apt to fall into, He will not abandon us, for otherwise He would discount all that horrific price He paid for us.

Instead, our ultimate glorification is as sure as His own present glorification. Our resurrection into eternal life is as certain as our Lord's resurrection two millennia ago. As the author of Hebrews put it:

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

What, then? As I look forward to the New Year and all that it may hold for my life or my death, the sufferings that may accompany a drastic therapy fired at a desperately difficult disease, I come once more to a thought I've already had a number of times since last spring: I cannot lose!

If I am healed of this disease, I cannot lose! If I die during the therapy, I still cannot lose! By His death on the cross, our Lord has purchased *me* for Himself, and all His promises to sinners who trust in Him are as sure as His Father's raising Him from the dead.

God grant that you also may have that confidence in Him and His success in bringing you to share His glory! Everything we meet in this new year will advance His Kingdom and the certainty of glory for all those who are His.

Much love in Him,

Fr. Bill.