

July 27, 2021

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- I am now one week post-discharge from the third cycle of chemotherapy. I've come down off the prednisone highs, and I am still coming up from the low blood counts. I'm looking forward to one more week of "rest" from the therapy, before plunging into cycle No. 4 on August 2.
- I have a PET scan next Wednesday (July 28). It will provide a clinical marker for yet another PET scan after cycle No. 6, in order to assess how well the six cycles have succeeded (or not) in pushing the lymphoma into remission.
- I will enter the hospital for a fourth (of six) cycles of chemotherapy on August 2.

BLOATED AND BRUISED

This is often the condition of cancer patients who receive several week-long infusions of cancer-killing drugs. The drugs are toxic to cells which divide rapidly (as cancer cells do). But there are other cells in the body which also divide rapidly. Most blood cells. Hair cells. And, so, patients with intense chemo therapies often lose their hair, and their blood counts drop. Sometimes they drop so much that a blood transfusion is needed, though I've not had this happen to me (yet).

So, for example, platelets - which cause blood to clot - drop. This means that small collisions - say, with a door handle, or bumping up against a door frame - things which you would never pay attention to when they happen, these generate bruises (!), sometimes big, nasty ones.

And, the bloated bit? Well, if you are getting liquids infused into you 24 hours a day for six days, and one of the drugs (prednisone) promotes water retention anyway - well, by the end of the week you have become Sponge Bob Square Pants after he's lain in a bucket of water for days! In the three cycles I've experienced thus far, I've gained about 20 pounds during those six days, and lost the same 20 pounds over the first 10 days after my discharge from the hospital.

There are ways to cope with this and to manage the side-effects. One really new drug I'm taking (acalabrutinib) can cause a splitting headache. The remedy? A cup of strong coffee! I do enjoy coffee, but sometimes it's not convenient to stop and make a cup of it. So, I've ordered some 200 mg capsules of caffeine from Amazon. When I take acalabrutinib now, I also take one of the caffeine capsules. No headache!

HIDING THE FUTURE

In a previous update, I mentioned that our futures - the near future, that is; tomorrow, the next week, the next month - these are unknown to us. Our Lord told us many things about the future, but these are essentially matters for the end of the age. Our **personal and near-term futures** are unknown to us. From the perspective of an old man, I say this is likely a blessing, though it can be frustrating to receive it.

When I look back at the most difficult periods of my life, I ask myself this - what difference would it have made if ***I had known beforehand*** the difficulties I was about to experience? In most cases, I think I would have turned and fled from those harrowing times. Consequently, I might have avoided the hardships, the heart aches. But, I would also have lost the blessings, the spiritual growth, the conformance to the image of Christ that such suffering would produce.

As I go through this rough patch with cancer, I'm watching for issues and processes that the Holy Spirit uses to guide our steps toward the New Jerusalem. What I see is this: most of the spiritual processes that the Holy Spirit "applies" to me are mirrored in the physical things that are happening to my body. This should be no surprise to us! We are, after all, composite creatures - we are both matter and spirit, dust of the ground and spirit imparted by the breath of God Himself (cf. Genesis 2:7).

It is easy, on one hand, to complain that my physician has not laid out all the steps of therapy he has planned for me. On the other hand, I've had to admit that from the doctor's perspective, he's likely learned this much in his years of guiding the therapy of seriously ill patients: if he lays out all the steps, all the side-effects, all the suffering that might ensue, this will greatly discourage his patients, so much so that they faint at the prospect and simply avoid the therapy entirely.

Thinking this way about myself, I acknowledge that I am cowardly. I do not like pain, nor discomfort, nor grief. I am selfish for my own contentments. Adventures are fun when experienced at arm's length (or an even greater distance). I like my perils to be vicarious. And so, looking back at a lifetime marked by several harrowing episodes, I'm shocked to find myself ***here*** - on ***this side*** of all those tales of woe - not only preserved, but enhanced.

Is it a life I would have chosen in all its details? No way!!

Is it a life filled with riches I could not otherwise have obtained? Of course!!

When we have finally attained the destiny our Lord foreordained for us (cf. Rom. 8:30), I wonder if we can ever find words to express our amazement at how our Lord worked every last second of those lifetimes - especially the ones filled with hardship and grief - into the glory of our conformance to His image.

ADD MY ONCOLOGIST TO YOUR PRAYERS

Many of you do so. Thank you. While keeping refreshed on current topics and issues in blood cancers via Ma Google and Google Scholar, I stumbled on to research he has conducted and published along with other cancer researchers across the county. I am blessed with access to his expertise, his experience, and the magnificent medical resources at the [University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center](#) and the [Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center](#)

Much love in Him. Barbara sends her thanksgiving for your prayers and also her greeting to you all.

Fr. Bill Mouser