

August 12, 2021

Dear Praying Family and Friends,

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Cycle No. 4 - a week-long cocktail of drugs infused continuously for six days - is now in the rearview mirror. I was discharged midday August 7. Today I am ascending from a cold-turkey withdrawal from one of the drugs (prednisone) which keeps me “revved up” for the week of my infusion.
- A [PET scan](#) on August 4 reveals no cancer after the first three cycles when compared to an earlier PET scan in late April. This does not mean, of course, that the lymphoma has disappeared. It's just not detectable by a PET scan.
- Current plans are for three more week-long infusions, to begin on August 23 and September 13.
- Then we wait for six weeks for all the drugs to clear out, and another PET scan will be done. What this one shows will determine in which direction the therapy will move next.

To sum up: Thus far, therapy is proceeding with all the success one could hope for. Our Lord has heard your prayers for me, and He appears to be smiling on them. I am grateful to Him, and to all of you.

## MEDITATIONS IN THE DARK

As I look for spiritual “parables” that run parallel with what's happening to my body, I hope these parables will not discourage you for my sake (or for your own sake), but rather prompt you, as I have been prompted, to do as Paul entreats us in 2 Cor. 6:

*We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: “In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*

This train of meditation arises from the disconcerting way my body has changed during therapy. None of you would recognize me in the grocery store. I've previously mentioned the missing beard and hair. Did I mention that 40 pounds of flesh has also melted away?

I look in the mirror and cannot recognize the man looking back at me in amazement. His ears are too big, and they stick out too far. He's got creases in his face I've never seen before. When this first began, it was my father who looked out of the mirror at me. Now even he has faded, and some other wretch has taken his place. His clothes hang on him. He no longer sits on hard surfaces - the sharp points of his hip bones torture what's left of his buns.

What am I to make of all this? I refuse to nibble at the cloying sweetness of self-pity. I know too much of our Lord's victory to pity myself. What then? I see what's happening to my body - it's decomposing, degenerating. How shall I think about it?

I often puzzle through these questions in the dark, the wee hours when I awake and do not fall asleep again. My thoughts turn first to our father Adam, his sin and the curse he called down on us all. And not just us, but the entire creation suffers under “the bondage of

corruption” (cf. Romans 8:21ff).

Why do I have lymphoma? Ultimately, it goes back to Adam. Why did my helpless nine-year old daughter die of an incurable brain stem tumor? Ultimately, it goes back to Eden and what Adam did there. Why will I eventually die, no matter how this therapy proceeds? Why will *you* die just as certainly? It began in Eden. It began with Adam.

## YOUNG FOOLS, OLD FOOLS

But there's more! Adam forged this cauldron of corruption by his sin, and he filled that cauldron with a horrific legacy. I am in Adam just as certainly as I was ever in the loins of my father, and he in his father. In Adam we are all one with one another. Adam's sin is my sin, his judgement is my judgment. His death sentences me to death. You too. As Paul put it, “In Adam, all die.”

So it's all Adam's fault! Except . . .

Well, there's even more! Remember “Like father, like son?” There's a good reason for that proverb. It's true and obvious to all. And, no where is it more obvious than this: Adam the sinner begat all mankind as sinners. King David knew this, as we see in the opening lines of Psalm 53:

*God looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. Every one of them has turned aside; They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.*

St. Paul quotes this Psalm to the same point in Romans 3:10.

The point: There is much blame to lay at Adam's feet, but there's plenty more to go round to each of us. Adam begat a race of sinners. I'm one of them. So are you.

You've heard another proverb: There's no fool like an old fool. It also comes to mind in the dark of night. I'm near the end of my days. I'm an old man. And I assure you that old men's thoughts irresistibly survey the past from the height of years. It's not a pretty picture. Old men and old women often end their days consumed with regret. We cannot remember what we were doing five minutes ago, but we remember too vividly the wreckage we left behind us five decades ago.

And what if the old man is still a fool? Oh my! What a fool he must be!! There's no fool like an old fool.

So, in the dark - recoiling from the memories of old sins, old follies, sordid things of which I am now ashamed, wretched things that terrify my conscience - I ask, “Am I still a fool? Have I repented of anything worth repenting?”

## LAST CHANCES

In an earlier update, I explained why The Great Litany in the *Book of Common Prayer* contains a prayer for delivery from *sudden* death. Not death itself, but **sudden** death. Adam has bequeathed us death in his fall and the curse which it called down on us. Why, then, pray to our God to deliver us from **sudden** death?

I answered this way - to know death is coming, to get a prelude, a sign, a warning that death is near, this is a huge blessing for a sinner. It gives a sinner one more opportunity, perhaps his last, best chance, to receive what grace a merciful God is willing to offer him.

And, of course, in our Lord's death on the cross we are offered infinite grace: the forgiveness of all our sins, and eternal life with the One who makes all things new. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16). As our Lord said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." (John 3:47).

## **REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR, REMEMBER YOUR GRAVE**

I write these things as an old man whose body is fading away. It's a common state of mind for the elderly, but it's not actually necessary.

A poem of haunting beauty ends the *Book of Ecclesiastes*, the poem on dying, death, and the end of man in chapter 12. It begins with these words:

*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,  
Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say,  
"I have no pleasure in them." (Ecclesiastes 12:1)*

If a Hebrew were to hear this poem recited, or possibly sung, for the very first time, he'd likely *not* know what a certain Hebrew word meant - the one translated *Creator*. In Hebrew, the word for *creator* is a homophone with the Hebrew word for *grave*. They sound alike when spoken, like the words *their* and *there* and *they're*.

So, what is the young man to remember in his youth? His Creator? Or, his grave? After all, the rest of the poem focuses on the way that this or that body part ceases to function, how the senses become insensible. And, finally, "... the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Most of what I relate above is prompted by the fact that death is coming, in my case very likely sooner than it is coming for you. But, it is coming!

Why wait until old age to think on these things? Solomon counsels the young man to do it - to remember that his grave awaits him, and also to remember that he is a creature, fashioned by God, to Whom he owes honor and obedience.

My present lot is a blessed one! In the matters I've related above, my lot is especially blessed because it focuses my mind on what is essential for a forgiven sinner to think about before our Lord summons me into His presence. St. Paul points the way, likening our fallen, disintegrating bodies to a house or a tent in which we dwell:

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).*

Indeed, my family and friends, I am groaning in this pitiful, shabby tent in which I presently

dwell. I am burdened, longing to be clothed as our Lord will determine, that my fading mortality may be swallowed up by life. Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

I heartily thank you all for everything you prayed for me. I am deeply grateful.

Much love in Him to you all,

Fr. Bill