



Mary Carol's Musings

Hopeful Thoughts from Mary Carol Wall

All Saints & All Souls

November 2, 2006

I visited my oncologist yesterday, and he was very encouraging. The radiated skin is healing well, but he doesn't want to start chemo until the 15th of November. That works out well, as I will have my first dose the week after my brother Daniel and his family are visiting, and there is no question but that I can drive up and get Caitie the evening of the 9th for a long weekend visit while her cousins are here. It looks like the other collegiates will be here, too... so, as usual, life is very, very good!

Dr. Welt is using a combination of drugs that are newer... abraxane (a taxane, like taxol) and avastin (an anti-angiogenesis drug... it interrupts blood vessel nourishments of tumors). As a result, the side effects should be less strong (I guess we don't even need to bother with premeds!), and it will probably take less than an hour to receive the dose via IV. There will be three months: one dose per week for three weeks, then a week off. I should be finished by mid-February. After that, it'll be several years of tamoxiphen (just taking a pill each day, I think), then he'll switch me to an aromatase inhibitor, which is the same regimen, I believe. Both of these drugs further reduce any estrogen my body may produce, because my version of cancer is a heavy user of estrogen in order to reproduce its cells. So... all in all, at this point it's a piece of cake! The taxols tend to thin out one's hair... some folks alot, some folks hardly at all.. I was getting excited about the possibility of keeping my curls, but when I read the literature for abraxane, it said that almost everyone has complete loss of hair. Sigh. On the other hand, they said almost everyone... hmmm....

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Today is All Souls' Day, and yesterday was All Saints' Day. It is a time that has many folks thinking about death. And yet, many sources that I have read or heard recently keep focusing on how God says, "Do not fear!". In fact, it is one of the most repeated phrases in the Bible.

Father Peter shared a homily, and began it by saying the same thing. We are not meant to be afraid, because God is *with* us! He spoke about the Communion of Saints... that those who have died before us are

still very much alive and active, and involved with us. They have gone home to God, and as such, are His saints. But we are all of the one body of Christ... and are part of that saint-hood. And if we are not sure of that, we can know that we are becoming part of Christ's body by living out the beatitudes.

Well, I got to thinking about that. We all hope to make it to heaven, but none of us consider ourselves comparable to the saints! We try to do our best, but keep getting distracted by financial issues, or social relationships and images, or health problems, etc. It is *very* difficult to stay focused on the Kingdom of God!

But, you know... all the people we recognized as saints had the same problems! They were not perfect people, and I think we do them a major disservice by convincing ourselves that they were. In fact, Dorothy Day knew people would talk about getting her canonized because of the work she did as prophet and as minister to the poor... and she passionately asserted that she did not want to be trivialized like that! The reason? Folks can call someone a saint, and be comfortable not living up to those standards because, after all, it takes an exceptional person to be a saint. Doesn't it?

Well, to be truthful, all those saints are folks pretty much like us. Like Dorothy Day, St. Augustine had a child out of wedlock. St. Paul had a temper, one that even put him at odds with other saints. Yet other saints liked rich foods and fine clothing, argued with their families, disrespected their parents or other legitimate authority figures, often jumped to conclusions, sometimes had to publicly retract words they had said, fought with pride/anger/jealousy/gluttony/other vices, and more than one fought with depression. And even when they 'got it right,' they never became perfect in all aspects of their personalities. What made each one of these individuals a saint is that: 1) each one recognized they were falling short of who they were meant to be; and 2) each one kept getting back up again **no matter how many times they fell**, by 3) hanging tight on to

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God to help them stay on their feet. Being human, they could, and often did, still fall. But they kept alive the spark of God in themselves, and even if on the ground, they kept their faces turned toward God. They never gave up. I think that is what makes us saints. It is recognizing that it is God who gives us hope, and refusing to relinquish that hope.

Back to Father Peter and the Beatitudes. I once heard a talk by Trish LaFortune in which she spoke of being terribly crushed by personal concerns and worries. She noted, tho', that one could walk out of one's own tomb by serving at the tomb of another... by giving to other people, and becoming involved in their lives and needs and hopes, a person is often lifted beyond their own limitations. Father Peter noted that the Beatitudes provide that opportunity and direction. Perhaps part of the reason that people who mourn, or are hungry, or are imprisoned are actually blessed is, perhaps, that they provide to us ways to become closer to God... by us giving comfort, food, visitations and counsel, we are being drawn closer to God... in fact, we are touched by God. And then both we and the world are that much more open to experiencing the Kingdom of God.

One last thought... Jesus told us not that the Kingdom was coming... he said that the Kingdom is already here! Hard to see it? Well, yes... at first. It takes some practice. And even then, I suspect that the most accomplished of all the saints never saw it with perfect vision... that's what Heaven is all about. But still, they *could* see and experience it to some extent.

How? I think it takes practice. The same way a soccer player becomes an accomplished dribbler, passer, goalie... the same way a public speaker learns to touch the hearts and minds of listeners... the same way a jogger builds him/herself up to complete a marathon... etc., etc., etc. We need to practice. Our belief is that God is everywhere... there is nowhere that he is not! Therefore, we should be able to find him!

Sometimes it's easy... many folks can find God in the sunset, in the mountains or the ocean, in a beautiful view. And it is also easy to sense God in the soft, strong curl of a baby's fist around our fingers, in the eyes and arms of those who love us, in kind and loving words and actions.

Sometimes, it's harder... God is in a parent's discipline, for it is one way children are taught to be safe and strong and wise. God can be in the experience of illness, for we learn to rely on his strength to work through each challenge and learn we need not, indeed cannot, do it all on our own.

And God is in death... it is our way home to him. St. Francis of Assisi called death our Sister... before we were born, we were fed, kept warm, heard sound, tho' muted... our needs were met. Then we were born, and experienced flavors and textures and light and color and music and voices and so much more! Our needs were met before, but once born, we could grow and experience so much, much more!

The same will happen when we finally leave this earth through Sister Death and make it home to God. I believe we will live, and love, and grow, and learn without the constraints we now have... but the more we can experience the Kingdom here on earth, the more we will be able to immerse ourselves in it after death. For we won't have died... we will have become more truly alive, and able to experience God and all He is.

So... what it comes down to, I believe, is this... we will not ever be able to take away the pain of death... it is a parting of people who love one another, after all. But we can take away the fear... and we know that the parting is temporary. And by practicing to see and experience God's Kingdom here and now, we will be living with ever increasing hope and love, and ever less fear and even pain.

May November be a truly wonderful month for all... God bless, and much love,

Mary Carol

