

I was struck by today's Second Reading. I kept saying to myself ... how could Paul say that he glories in his weaknesses and in his suffering. I'm sure most of us do not want to embrace any weakness or any suffering. If we can help it. For me, I will always steer away from difficult situations that might cause me heartache or anxiety. Moreover, Paul says that when he is at his weakest point, he is the strongest at the same time. At first glance this looks to me to be a contradiction. You are either weak or you are strong. You can never be both at the same time. I want to go back in time and ask Paul ... what do you mean?

He probably would reply "In the moments of my extreme disappointments and difficulties, I sought Jesus Christ and I let Jesus Christ take over what I say, what I think and what I do. The result was that I stopped relying solely on my own power and I let Jesus be present within me to carry me through the difficult moment that I was facing. In this way, I faced what I had to face and I overcame what seemed to me impossible to do. I became most strong at the moment when I felt the weakest because I trusted and I relied on Jesus Christ, my God".

We all have problems to face and difficult situations to endure. These moments can be moments of grace rather than moments of desperation. They can be moments of opportunities rather than moments of destruction. This depends on how much we are willing to bring Jesus Christ into such situations. This depends on whether we rely solely on our giftedness when facing these realities or whether we are prepared to stop and listen to what Jesus is telling us. Indeed, we learn a lot through our moments of weakness. If we listen we might have an opportunity to reflect on where our life is going. It may provide us with a chance to learn some very basic things that will surely influence how we are going to live the rest of our lives.

This summer Ann & I will be celebrating our 39th wedding anniversary. For those who have not heard, I retired from IBM this past January, after almost 41 years. As I look at our parish, I see many families getting started. It only seems like yesterday that Ann & I were sitting out there with our 4 children ... Kathy, Karen, Jackie, & Tommy. As a family we went through Boy Scouts, Girl Scout, Sports, Ballet, Gymnastics, Chorus, Swim Team (both year-round and summer league), Marching Band, Orchestra, Color Guard, Winter Guard, Martial Arts, I think I got them all. As a family we went through many times of trial & tribulation, trying to balance family, school & work. One time we had to seek out legal advice to help with a family problem. There were times when the Bills did not match the income and we had to do some creative financing. But, through it all, we always tried to keep Jesus in our daily activity. Now, all the children are grown and have left home and are living on their own ... Well, Ann still has her oldest child living at home ... I'm not going anywhere.

I've learned that every day is a gift from God. God cares for us so much that He has given to us each day to live to the fullest. Get the most from each hour, each day, and each age of your life. Each day is a grace through which we can become aware of so much beauty around us and through which we can help all those that we come in contact with. Another thing I've learned is the value and importance of simple prayers. I have to admit that during my busy days before retirement, I do not find it easy to pray. To

stop what I was doing. Even now, sometimes I become so distracted and at times so preoccupied that I don't have the time and making the time is difficult. I began to realize that it does not have to be a long process. Having Jesus with you can be a constant prayer, ... Like ... "Jesus, I trust in you." There are the prayers that my parents taught me when I was a little child. It is important for parents to teach children simple prayers like the Hail Mary, the Our Father, the Glory Be, and the Rosary. These prayers taught as children will always remain in the deepest core of our spirits and in turn will enable us to communicate with our God spontaneously in our difficult moments.

I've also learned is that very often in moments of sickness and difficulties, you cannot control anything anymore. Generally speaking as we grow up we develop more and more the tendency to be in control and through control we build our own securities and we become dependent on these securities. We feel that WE are the ones in control. However, in times of weaknesses and sicknesses we clearly show that our security lies only in God. All our efforts and all our qualities can help but in many cases they are not able to provide the necessary security to get better. Ultimately we come to realize that our security, our hope and our trust is God. So, I live every day, using all the gifts that God has given me, but also knowing full well that without God I am fooling myself. I live my daily life in constant companionship with my God because with God I have the ultimate victory.

I'm sure most of you have heard or read the poem "Footprints in the Sand" ... It talks about a person having a dream that they are walking along the beach with Jesus and they look back and see the footprints and they notice that sometimes there is only one set of footprints. The first reaction is that they feel that Jesus left them, but in reality, Jesus never left ... he was doing the carrying.

Let us continue our celebration and praise God for carrying us through all our trials and tribulations, for His being there ready to listen to us. In the exercise of all of the virtues of ordinary human relationships, in trust, in acceptance, in affection, in patience, in devotion, that we too will experience the building of the kingdom. There is in this truth a real consolation for us, a sense of purpose, because no matter what the circumstance might be, Jesus is always there to help you.