

A Reflection on Staying The Course with God

SR. MARY THOMAS, PBVM

I come that you may have life and have it to the full. — John 10:10

This year we had the experience of watching Olympic athletes put forth their best on the world stage. Their moment on the stage was backed by years of preparation as they single-heartedly focused on their goal. In their desire to excel, they were reaching for the “more.”

Deep within, we all have been gifted with a desire for the “more.” We search for fulfillment and strive to become self-actualized. This desire for the more actually is the basis for our longing for God and for what is eternal or lasting. As we have learned from St. Augustine, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord.”

The challenge we face is keeping the hunger or restlessness directed toward God. We can become easily sidetracked into choosing lesser goods. We know of cases in which the relentless pursuit of fame and fortune has led to moral bankruptcy. Whenever we make a created reality our ultimate, we have placed upon that creation — whether a relationship or a career goal — a burden it cannot sustain.

These are more extreme examples of how our desire for “the more” can express itself and cause us to become less whole in the process. The behavior also is part of the human condition that we all share. All through salvation history, we humans have demonstrated repeatedly that in our search for the ultimate, we have wandered far afield, and God just as steadfastly has continued to call us home.

In Jesus we see the fullest expression of what a person can be in God. Jesus says, “I came that you may have life and see what it means to have life in the fullest.”

Why is it so hard for us to stay the course in our desire for union with God? We struggle with the feeling of longing, that sense of emptiness. Our societal messaging says we ought to be full, so if we are not, what is wrong with us? To escape this feeling, we run. We numb ourselves.

What if we saw those times as an invitation, not a failing, a doorway into “the more” rather than a sign of our ineptitude? Jesus, who emptied himself to fully assume our human reality, also can help us abide in this empty space that we want to

The challenge we face is keeping the hunger or restlessness directed toward God. We can become easily sidetracked into choosing lesser goods.

avoid, even resist. Paradoxically when we fail to enter into this space that is really normative for humans, we impoverish ourselves.

In the emptiness and through the willingness of Mary, the Word became flesh in the womb. This is not only Mary’s story. It is our story too. The Word also becomes flesh in and through us, in our womblike empty places of longing and hunger. It is fear of our incompleteness that shackles us, not our incompleteness itself. By being willing to enter into the space of our longing for more, we are opening up to God — all we need do is abide,



notice and allow love to free us and empower us. In this way, God reminds us of our true home, invites us into deeper union as we also freely choose to enter into union with God.

It is in the letting go, the willingness to entrust ourselves and those we love to God, that we arrive at a measure of serenity. This letting go is an exercise that we must undertake many times. Often it is when we know beyond a doubt that what we are facing exceeds our inner resources, when we are pressed against the wall, and letting go is the only viable option, that the power of God within us is released to act in and through us. We find the courage to stay. Small wonder that we want to avoid this space.

This is the gift we then bring to people seeking health care. In a world that spins very fast, people want control. When our patients or family members are stressed, they push for certainty. The ability to tolerate ambiguity is very hard when the lives of loved ones are at stake. Many will feel threatened by what they are facing. Fear overwhelms and makes it so hard to be open. We are the ones who can accompany and help them be present to what is.

As caregivers, one of our roles is to recognize the moment for what it is and help our patients to abide in the ambiguity, to stay at the threshold moment until the fuller truth is revealed. I have heard moving stories from people who gave testimony to that crossing-over point, the leap of faith, and how they experienced a greater reality that was indeed there to meet them. Patients speak of every medical handoff working seamlessly in rapid succession. Every flawless step was needed to preserve their life. The outcome was more than the sum total of those present. They could sense

As caregivers, one of our roles is to recognize the moment for what it is and help our patients to abide in the ambiguity, to stay at the threshold moment until the fuller truth is revealed.

a power greater than all those assembled at work.

As Jesus said to the gathered crowd after he raised Lazarus, “Untie him and let him go free.” We are the faith-filled companions and life-sustaining community as we help our patients listen so that God, through us, can release the shackles of fear as often as is necessary. Faith keeps us open to “the more” and allowing God’s power and grace to flow through us.

When lives touch, a sacramental moment of word and sign is realized. We are graced and nourished. When all things work for the good, even what is lacking in us becomes the doorway to participation in “the more,” which is God’s own fullness.

“I came that you may have life and have it to the full.” This is not a past, pious statement. This is a daily promise that is fulfilled whenever we have the courage to reframe and see our longing for “more” as the first fruits of that promise.

SR. MARY THOMAS, PBVM, is senior vice president of mission services at Avera McKennan Hospital in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, May - June 2018
Copyright © 2018 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
