

## **The Catholic Doctor Is In: Dealing with Bad News from the Doctor**

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of you faith produced steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” James 1:2-4

Recently, I saw a gruff elderly man who I have followed for many years with advanced heart and pulmonary disease. He always seemed like a very unhappy man and bitter about his medical afflictions. I decided on this visit to ask about his spirituality. His answer saddened me: “I don’t believe in that stuff!” He did not believe in God or even a higher power. Later that day I saw a joyful lady that I have followed for over 20 years post bypass surgery. About 10 years ago she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had believed she had beaten it. During our visit, she informed me her cancer had returned. With the help of the Lord she had already accepted this cross and told me “He would see me thru this.” Her smile and attitude warmed my soul.

I have consistently experienced this over the years. The patients of mine who have a strong belief in our Lord are blessed with the grace required to accept their illness. The Holy Spirit gives them the strength and comfort to deal with the suffering they will have to endure.

As a physician, I believe it is part of my ministry to help these patients cope. Although, very commonly when I am done seeing them they have actually uplifted my spirit and have ministered to me more than I to them. Invariably these people have strong faith that, in turn, gives them hope and acceptance. They realize and know how temporary their earthly lives are and rejoice at the prospect of spending eternity with our Savior, Jesus. As St. Elizabeth Ann Seton once said “afflictions are the steps to Heaven.”

Even scientists and secularists admit there is something going on with people that either pray or meditate. T.M. Luhrmann, a professor of Anthropology at Stanford, recently wrote in a New York Times article: “One of the most striking scientific discoveries about religion in recent years is that going to church weekly is good for you. Religious attendance, at least, religiosity boosts the immune system and decreases blood pressure. It may add as much as two to three years to your life.”

As my mother used to say “offer it up,” an expression not used so much in today’s world. One of my favorite verses has always been Romans 5:3-5, “More than that, we

rejoice in our suffering knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope will never disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

Will you be prepared when the doctor gives you bad news? Arm yourself with daily prayer, meditation, and frequent participation in the wonderful gift of the Sacraments. You, too, can be an inspiration to your family and friends—and even your physician—as to how you accept the trials that come with your health issues.

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