

Aging Gracefully - An Invitation to Contemplation

This week, for your consideration, is a summary of the discussion on learning, from Sr. Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years – Growing Older Gracefully*. Following the summary are quotations on the burden and blessing of learning, a personal reflection, and a call to contemplate meaning in view of your own life, no matter where you happen to be on the journey.

Learning

Sr. Joan writes that “learning is a not only a life-long task but also a lifelong summons to renewal of the soul.” As we age, we fear “losing our minds” and notice signs of diminishment frequently – a forgotten name, a misplaced key, a missed appointment. We focus on mental dysfunction, but based on current neurological research, although our brains may be physically smaller, they are no less intellectually capable than when we were younger. Aging brings a wealth of experience to our thinking and our ability to assimilate and analyze data. We must, however, continue to learn and to develop throughout these years. Sr. Joan writes about passive aging and active aging. Active aging calls us to keep living, although the pace and manner of our living may have to change. If our hearing diminishes, reading more may be the answer, and if our eyesight changes, perhaps we listen to tapes. The question of what to learn is up to us, whether we deepen existing knowledge or learn something new so that we may be of service to others.

Burden and Blessing

“A burden of these years is fear that they bring nothing but incompetence to our once competent selves.”

“A blessing of these years is that we find ourselves at a time of life when we can finally concentrate on all the things we have ever wanted to learn and know and, as a result, become an even more important, focused, more spiritual person than we have ever really been before.”

Personal Reflection

The formal education we obtain prepares us for only one small area of life...and sometimes the knowledge we have gained becomes obsolete, just ask anyone who studied computer science in the 1980's. However, having made a decision to study psychology when I was in my late forties, I know that learning happens at any age, if one desires it. Whether formal or informal, the learning process is transformative. Having worked as a CPA and as a Medicare consultant, I found myself constantly learning and researching emerging issues. Entering an entirely new field of study was daunting, but I was able to apply the things I had already learned...research skills, time management, analysis, and so on. I was able to add something else to the learning process, too – a sense of purpose and meaning. Knowing that the knowledge and experience gained through study would benefit others made a difference in my approach to family, school and work. Seven years from start to finish, the sense of mission I felt as I completed the program led me to being a more deeply caring and spiritual person. I am grateful to serve others at Holy Guardian Angels Parish.

Invitation to Personal Reflection and Contemplation

What are your interests?

What do you want to learn?

Pray for inspiration to be a person who uses talents and skills for others. Become a living prayer – someone who humbly serves in the name of Jesus.

Warm regards,

Barbara Szulc, Psy.D.

Parish Counseling Services are available upon request. For an appointment, send an email to BSzulc@HGAParish.org. There are no fees; however, Holy Guardian Angels Parish kindly accepts free-will offerings.