

Aging Gracefully - An Invitation to Contemplation

This week, for your consideration, is a summary of the discussion on tale-telling, from Sr. Joan Chittister's book, *The Gift of Years – Growing Older Gracefully*. Following the summary are quotations on the burden and blessing of tale-telling, 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.

Tale-Telling

Every elder has a story to tell, which involves history on both a personal and global level. Yet, the world in which we live does not appear to value the elders' stories, wisdom or knowledge. However, if we do not pass on our stories, the younger generations will not have the opportunity to understand tradition or how and why they belong to a family or community. Sr. Joan writes, "The tale-telling of the older people became the catechism of the family. These were the life lessons meant to make us all stronger, wiser and truer." Our elders' stories provide us with opportunities to hear life lessons, and if we miss them, we may find ourselves having to learn those lessons the hard way.

Burden and Blessing

"A burden of tale-telling is to think that by avoiding our responsibility to be part of living history we will stay forever young. By not telling those who follow us the stories of what it took to get here, we fail the harvest of our own life and the plowing days of theirs."

"A blessing that comes with tale-telling is the awareness that we have now done our duty to life. We have distilled our experiences to the point that they can become useful to someone younger."

Personal Reflection

I appreciate stories of all kinds, but none more so than those of family and friends. Often, as we gather around the table for dinner, particularly during the holidays, someone begins telling a story. The telling and re-telling of familiar stories brings humor, truth and joy that enables us to celebrate our lived experience and share important lessons with one another. It is interesting to note that everyone has a story to tell, whether young or old, and we find ourselves encouraging one another to "go next." Even the youngest can tell the story about the time geese followed us at Brookfield Zoo, honking at us to share our popcorn! Tale-telling is a way of sharing valuable lessons learned (don't eat popcorn around geese) and expressing our love for one another. As a mental health professional, I believe it is also important to learn to tell our life stories, for it is in the act of relating to others that we discover who we are, appreciate our own resilience, foster self-care, and experience healing.

Invitation to Personal Reflection and Contemplation.

With whom do you share your stories?

Is there something about your life experience that you believe would benefit the younger generation through tale-telling?

Are you interested in memorializing your story in order to share it with others?

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.

