

Aging Gracefully - An Invitation to Contemplation

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

Fear

Sr. Joan writes "It is not the getting older that is difficult. It is the fear of getting older that plagues us." Culturally attuned to value physical beauty, achievement and being able to easily do things we fear the aging process, whereby we slow down or lose dexterity, even vitality. We view getting older as one loss on top of another, and forget the gains that come from realizing that we are more than simply what we can do. Rather, it is about continuing to grow, learn and give of ourselves to younger generations. Learning to cope with the fear of diminishment is one of the challenges of later years.

Burden and Blessing

"The burden of these years is the possibility of giving in to the fear of invisibility, of uselessness, of losing our sense of self and human obligation. Fear tempts us to believe that life is over – rather than simply changing."

"The blessing of fear in these years is that it invites us to become the fullness of ourselves. It comes to us in the nighttime of the soul to tell us to rise as new selves in fresh and exciting ways – for our sake, of course, but for the sake of the rest of the world, as well."

Personal Reflection

When my ophthalmologist recommended eye injections, my first thought was, "Is this what I have to look forward to?" I recognize that aging brings certain losses, but gratefully remembering the time I spent training at the Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, allowed me to more readily accept my situation. Working at the Lighthouse inspired me in more ways than I expected. I was a daily witness to hope,

courage, and resilience in the face of blindness or visual impairment. The spirit of community and caring is palpable at the Lighthouse, which has served others for more than 100 years. I will take care of my eyes, but will not fear the loss of sight because so many beautiful non-sighted people have shown me how to live fully.

At 47, I decided to go back to school to become a counselor, then a clinical psychologist. I became licensed in 2017, the end result of a 12-year journey in formal education. A fellow student contacted me after hearing me speak at our graduation ceremony in 2012. We met for coffee, and I shared my story with her, answering questions on the practicalities of working and meeting school, practicum and internship requirements, while raising a family at the same time. Only later did I learn I had inspired her to continue her education beyond the master's level and pursue a doctorate in clinical psychology. Our willingness to share our stories and experiences allows God's goodness and grace to be known and to be an inspiration for the good of the world.

Invitation to Personal Reflection and Contemplation

Does fear prevent you from changing, growing, learning?

In what ways can you learn to cope with challenges, diminishment or fear of weakness?

Is there something you have always wanted to learn about or understand?

Are you willing to commit some time to learning something new?

What grace will you share with others as a result of your learning?

Warm regards,

Barbara Szulc, Psy.D.

Parish Counseling Services are available upon request. For an appointment, send an email to BSzulc@HGAParish.org. No fees will be assessed, however, free-will offerings to Holy Guardian Angels Parish are kindly accepted.