

Mother's illness teaches lessons

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Over the years my admiration has grown for people who remain peaceful and constructive in circumstances they had not planned and would never choose for themselves. I am not able adequately to analyze that ability. But, as I have thought about it over time, I think of two qualities that seem always to be present in such individuals.

The first is a sense of realism. Nothing fancy about that. I mean only that such persons have a capacity to deal honestly with whatever challenges them. They neither run from reality nor gloss over it. Rather, they face it appropriately, sometimes heroically, even if that means making decisions that are very difficult for them.

The second quality I identify in such individuals is an awareness that their lives are neither defined by nor limited to moments of suffering or even the threat of death. In other words, I find in such persons an awareness that God's loving care for them is so deep that even the direst human circumstances can never separate them from it. It is this awareness, I believe, that allows them to sustain the joyful hope they so often demonstrate.

I am drawn to this theme this week by the fact that my mother is experiencing some health difficulties and has been hospitalized for over a week. She would never choose for herself the uprooting,



A LONG THE WAY

the discomfort or the uncertainty she now experiences. But she is certainly facing this challenge with courage, patience and more than a touch of good humor. In doing so, she is giving strength to us who love her. She is also teaching us some lessons about living that I hope to remember when I am asked to deal with the kind of concerns she now faces.

Perhaps this story will give an example of such a good lesson. I was not present when it occurred but my sister, Helen, told me about it. One morning this week when the nurse first entered Mom's room to start the day's care, she asked Mom a series of questions aimed obviously at testing her alertness. Their exchange went like this:

Nurse: What day is it Mrs. Clark?

Mom: It's Saturday, isn't it?
Nurse: That's right. And do you know what date it is?

Mom: Well ... let's see. I think it's the 18th of March.

Nurse: Good. And who's president of the United States?

Mom: (at this point feigning a bit of exasperation) Why, Bill Clinton, of course! (pause..pause...pause) And who's VICE president of the United States!?!?

I am sure the nurse knew the answer to the question, but in the surprise of the moment was unable to supply it. She laughed about it and continued to talk with my mother for a while about how Mom was feeling and about the program for the day.

When the nurse came into Mom's room the next morning she did so saying, "Good morning Mrs. Clark. Today is Sunday, March 19. Al Gore is vice president of the United States, and I'm not asking you any more questions!"

You have always been very kind and hospitable to my mother when she has come to visit over the years. I know you will extend that kindness in prayer for her recovery from the blood disorder that troubles her just now.

Thanks so much for your kindness and for the support and understanding of those who have taken on more work and/or adjusted their schedules to allow me to spend time with my mother and family these days.

Peace to all.



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