

Unfortunately in our lives, many times we perceive that God has forgotten that we're out here praying for his help. Quite honestly, sometimes we even think that He doesn't care.

The death of two-year old Maddox Derkosh at the Pittsburgh Zoo a couple of weeks ago took me back to a painful situation in my life. Eighteen years ago, I was angry at God because He didn't answer a prayer that He just had to answer. He let Jessica, the only child of two good friends, die from cancer at the age of two. I just kept asking myself: *What kind of God would let that happen?* It's a probably a question that little Maddox' parents are asking right now.

As I sat in church waiting for little Jessica's funeral mass to begin, I got angrier each time I looked across the aisle at that undersized casket. In despair, I called on God to justify that death. His answer came 15 minutes later in the form of a 3-minute homily by Fr. Frank Almada that began: "I'll bet a lot of you are angry with God right now."

Father had my attention...and the next words he spoke not only changed my life, but helped me to better appreciate my faith and this gospel. He simply asked 3 questions:

1. How many of us in our lifetimes had made Christ present to as many people as Jessica had in just two years?
2. How many of us wished that Jessica had never been born so that we didn't have to experience the pain of her loss? And
3. How many of us would deny her being in heaven so that she could remain with us on earth?

When Fr. Almada finished, I realized that in my selfishness, I had forgotten that faith isn't based on being healed it's based on being saved, and most definitely, thank God, Jessica had been saved. As Christians, we have to be about the big picture.

In Fr. Bonnar's homily for Maddox, he described it this way:

"To have faith is to surrender our lives in loving trust to the Lord Jesus, often without knowing answers to all of our questions, but knowing that He is with us every step of the way. He never abandons us. To have faith is to overcome the disillusionment of this moment by hoping in the Lord and seeing Him as our saving help."

The Samaritan in today's Gospel GOT IT; his fellow ex-lepers did not. The Samaritan returned to thank God **not** for his healing, but for his **salvation**. Jesus had made him whole through the gift of faith, not the healing of the leprosy. And he tells him to: *Stand up and go...your faith has saved you!*

This week, I received a copy of a letter a friend of mine...who is a holy and brilliant scholar in the Eastern Church... sent to his students and faculty. He shared with his community that he had experienced a fall that resulted in trauma to the point where he now has to relearn how to stand, walk and do the things that we take for granted. If that weren't enough, tests revealed colon cancer... and tomorrow he will undergo surgery to address the problem. Yet here is how he closed that letter:

"Please don't worry about me. The cancer appears to be contained. I am blessed to be in one of the finest medical facilities in the world. **Most important, my faith has never been stronger**, my hope never more firm and my love for all of you never more palpable. **I trust that you will receive this news in the same faith, hope and love that I have.**"

That's what Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel. None of us is immune from suffering, but we can choose to use it to bring us closer to Christ... and we can choose to be immune from sin. Just as Jesus cleansed all of the lepers, He gives all of us the gift of faith...but, like the Samaritan, it is up to us to choose to accept it and live it.

Remember, had it not been for their leprosy, the ten would not have encountered Christ to be healed. Had it not been for his faith, the Samaritan would not have been saved.

So on this Thanksgiving, in addition to your family, jobs, wealth and the things that give you status in our secular world, I challenge you thank God for any suffering you are experiencing and to use that suffering to draw yourself closer to Him in prayer;

I challenge you to thank God for any mistakes that you made and to use them as an opportunity to seek forgiveness from those you have offended and even those who only perceive that you have offended them.. **AND, most importantly,**

In this year of Faith, I invite you to thank God for your gift of faith, which will enable you to meet all of your problems head-on and see death for what it really is, nothing more than the portal through which we return to our Heavenly Father.

Thanks be to God. AMEN?!