



The Anglican Catholic Church of Canada

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DIOCESAN CIRCULAR – January 2011

Meet Father Douglas Nicholson

(The following report has been culled from notes posted by Deborah Gyapong on a few web sites – reprinted here with her permission.)



Bishop Carl Reid ordained Douglas Nicholson to the priesthood today (December 11, 2010). Six years ago, on the exact same date, Douglas was ordained a deacon when Father Jim Tilley was ordained to the priesthood. Father Jim, who serves our Oshawa parish (Good Shepherd), was among the clergy who attended this happy event. The ordination took place in a votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, hence the red vestments in Advent.

I had met Father Douglas a few times in passing, but never spoken with him before Friday when a small group of us sang Mattins in plainsong, did a said Eucharist in choir-like precision, then went out to breakfast at The Diner, a few blocks walk from our church.

I had invited my Anglican Communion friend at the last minute to join us for plainsong as he loves it and sings really well and the worship was so beautiful because all of us were strong singers and familiar enough with plainsong

to really enter into the psalms and canticles in a worshipful way. I thought of Brother Stephen Treat and what every day must be like for him! I was so glad to see my Anglican Communion friend. He's one of these people who is so easy to love. And he was all excited about a course he is taking on the Pentateuch. He could not join us for breakfast, so it was just me and then Deacon Douglas, Michael Trolly and the bishop. The Diner was packed and they stuck us in the corner in what seems like a sun porch with windows on three sides. So it was as if we were plunked on the sidewalk, able to see the gray skies and the passersby in the trendy Westboro neighbourhood. We all ordered the breakfast special but asked them to hold the meat, since it was Friday.



Father Douglas Nicholson has been yearning 20 years for this day!

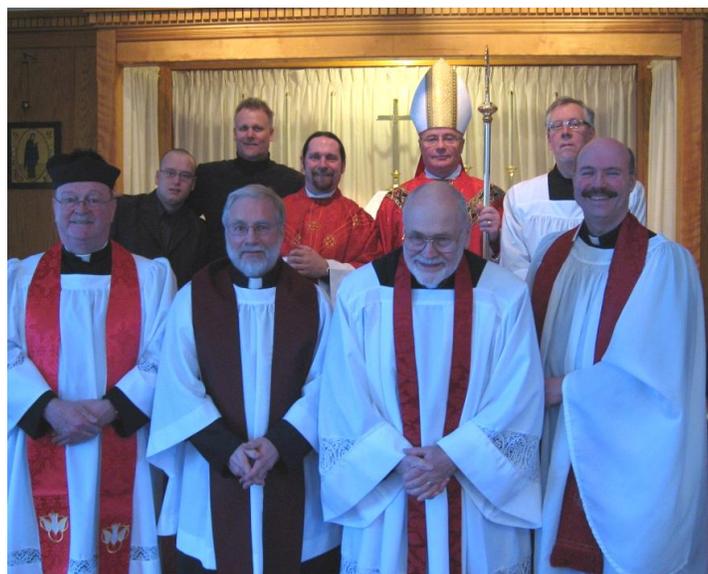
This was what made me fall in love with Douglas Nicholson. There was a baby sitting in a high chair about three feet away from him. His father was trying to feed him. He must have been eight or nine months old. He had yogurt or something creamy smeared around his mouth and suddenly he was so captivated by the warmth and the playful affection of this priest-to-be that he lost interest in his breakfast. I love a man who loves babies and children in a fatherly way. Actually, our whole table was besotted. Bishop Carl pulled out his phone and tried to take a picture of this enthralled and charming baby boy — alas it was too blurry to be reproduced here. Michael Trolly, who can't wait to have a whole pile of kids of his own, was also goo-goo-eyed. But then another family sat down a few tables away with a baby girl with huge blue eyes and a fascination for the men in black and the little lad next to us had competition.

During the ordination service, the two-year old twins Kyle and Tristan kept up a running commentary in the back, causing many of our parishioners to shoot amused glances at each other over the music of their voices. "Let's go home!" one of them said and mom had to take them downstairs.



The bishop receives a blessing from the new priest.

Our society has become a place that is less and less welcoming to children and old people. We have a parish where we cherish the young and the old. Father Douglas strikes me as an authentic, loving and faithful priest. It is a happy day for us in the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada. May our new priest serve the Lord many years in faithfulness and love.



Clergy joined us from our Oshawa, Spencerville and Barrhaven parishes.

In the front row: Father Jim Tilley from our Oshawa parish (who was ordained priest on this date six years ago when Douglas Nicholson was ordained deacon); Father Douglas Hayman of our Spencerville Parish and chaplain of Augustine College; our retired Ottawa priest Father David Walsh; and Father Kipling Cooper, our former Ottawa curate who established our Barrhaven parish. In the back row: Michael Trolly, our Ottawa postulant who was organist, cantor and litanist for the ordination; server Mark Voyce (father of the aforementioned two-year old twin

boys); Father Douglas Nicholson; Bishop Carl Reid; server Bill Stewart (who is also our parish treasurer and Rector's Warden. Missing from the photo is Kalen Randoy who was crucifer for the service.

Deborah Gyapong



(OTHER) DIOCESAN NOTES AND NEWS

- The Rev'd Keith Kirkwood has announced his reception into the Roman Catholic Church on Thursday November 9th. Keith served as Deacon and Assistant Curate in the Lower Mainland parishes for several years after his ordination. He then went to the small parish at Kamloops, and from there to Medicine Hat, AB. He has been suffering some health problems for some time, and finally resigned his parish and then his

Orders. He moved to Fanny Bay on Vancouver Island to look after his parents and regain his health. We wish him well for the future.

- Please update your Diocesan Directory. Father Gérard Trinque has a new telephone number: 1-888-831-4145



The End of an Era

Goodbye, 2010. For good or ill 2010 is consigned to the years before the Flood, to rest with the other years of recorded human history. And for all intents and purposes for most of us, it will never be seen again. Never be seen again - until that day, that day about which most of us perhaps prefer not to think of, when this year, with all its doings, all that was said, or thought, or felt in secret or in public, shall stand revealed before the judgment seat of Christ. Ah! You thought you were rid of it, did you? Well, it may have passed beyond our immediate control, but it is not forgotten. It will reappear, at a time when we may well wish it wouldn't.

What to do with it, then? Why, turn it over to God, nail it, as it were, to Calvary's Cross, *ask* that it be sprinkled with the cleansing Blood of Jesus, our year just passed. Claim for our year the forgiveness of Christ. You know, we are usually at this time of the year urged to simply forget about the past, and face the New Year with hope that it will be different. We are urged to make resolutions that will somehow miraculously correct the mistakes of the past, the keeping of which will turn us into new people. Now, I don't know about you. But I do know about me. And I have this sneaking suspicion that most of you aren't very different from me. And I declare to you, and not proudly, that tomorrow I am very likely to be exactly the same person that I am today. And if I do not get serious about myself and about my God, I am going to have to do two things: 1. stand before you at the beginning of 2012 and say the same things about myself as I could say now; and, 2. see my years and my sins unfold in an unchanging and shameful pattern and fashion before the judgment seat of Christ, when I, myself, will have conveniently forgotten all about them, whitewashed them, convinced myself that when the chips were down, when the time was right, I would change what I was, and become the darling of the Angels of Heaven.

The first thing that we have to realize is that if nothing changes, nothing changes. That's a pretty basic rule that almost always holds true. And the first necessary thing for change to occur in our lives is to admit that something needs to change. The things that may need to change can be small or big, it doesn't matter. The point is, if there are things about ourselves that make ourselves unhappy with ourselves, or make others unhappy with us, if we have some kind of "dis-ease", then we ought to seek to change it. It may be guilt from an almost-forgotten past, a hatred, a person not forgiven. It may be a negative attitude, depression, anger. It may be an infidelity, a broken promise, a violent nature. It may be sins of omission, things not done. It matters little what it is. If we simply try to resolve that next year, this New Year, we will be different, we will be very disappointed, yet again!

All the things of our past have conspired to make us what we are. And a certain portion of our past, and the inclination of our human nature, is sin. And we are powerless to change that. But there is one who has all power, and that one is God. And God the Father sent the Son, whose Name is called JESUS, to save His people from their sins. This is something that we must recall to our minds over and over and over again: that in Jesus, God has provided a way of dealing with sin, my sin, your sin, so that it will have no more power over us. God has promised that those who turn to Christ, and accept Him as Saviour, and confess their sins and truly repent of them - those sins He will no more remember against them. They will be blotted out. It's like using a computer and going back to type over an error - the whole error is so changed that there is no evidence at all that it even existed. So it can be with your life, if you will but trust Christ to do that. But in order to correct a typing error, you must first concede that the error has been made! You can't take it out, if you refuse to admit that you could possibly have done such a thing. But once you go back and look at it, and agree that it is wrong, then the correction can be made, and the finished product will contain no error. So God invites you to do with your life.

Once that is done, then the New Year opens up with new possibilities. For once we agree that we need the love and sacrifice and blood of Christ to purify our past, so we must move to acknowledge that we require the guidance and love of God to direct our future. We cannot make resolutions that we then plan to keep by the

exercise of our own wills. We must make a resolution to seek to know nothing except God's will for us, and ask nothing other than the power to carry it out. That is the Christian way, the way of the pilgrim. All other ways are temptations placed before us by the father of lies, the following of which return us to the paths of ruefulness, regret, anger and self-pity.

Don't go far into this New Year without due reflection upon the truth about yourself, brothers and sisters. Seek out the Sacrament of Penance, if you cannot by private means quiet your own conscience. And start the New Year by placing your complete trust in God's guidance and Grace. Don't trust to what you have done in the past, but daily seek to be renewed in a new way, unto the holiest of all. As the poet said, "Put your hand into the hand of God; it shall be better to you than a light, and safer than a known way." And may God abundantly bless to you this New Year, that you may be vessels of His grace, and lights of the world in this your generation. *Amen.*

Fr. Michael Birch

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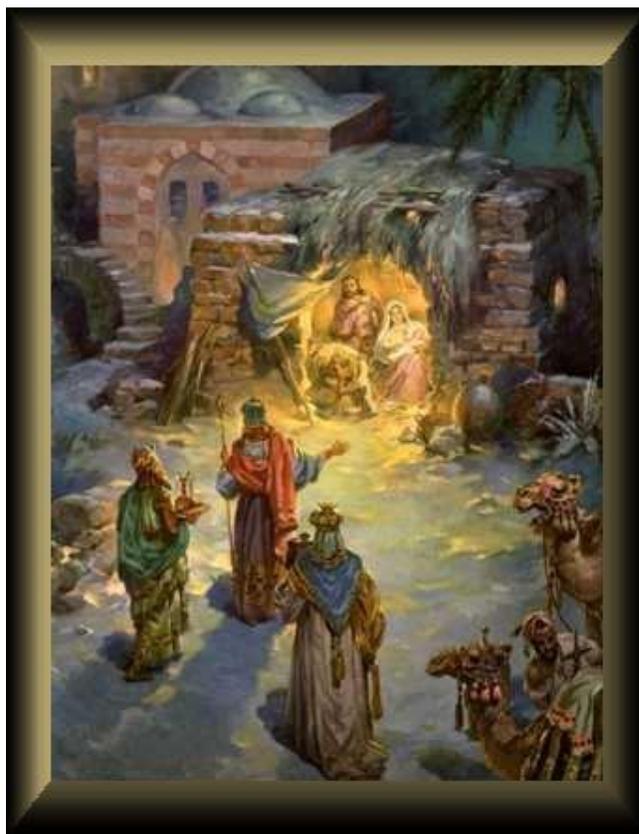
As Father Michael reminds us, while we ponder this new year, only by the sacrifice of Christ's blood are we made at one with God – our past sins being nailed to the Cross with Him.

None of us needs reminding that while the Feast DAY of Christmas has now passed, the SEASON does not end until January 5; and then, on the 6th – the Epiphany, the Manifestation of our Lord to the Gentile world, recalling the arrival of the Magi at the stable in Bethlehem.

Although many will suggest that there was no particular symbolism attached to the gifts that the Magi brought, it is thought by others that they were indeed highly symbolic: gold for a King, frankincense for a Priest, and myrrh as a reminder that He came into the world to die for our sins.

Some Renaissance artists were sensitive to this – portraying the Crucifixion on a wall of the stable above the Infant Jesus, as a reminder of His all-important Sacrifice some 33 years hence. Let us not therefore rush away from either the thoughts of Christmas or His Manifestation to the Gentile world.

A Blessèd Epiphanytide to All!



FROM MAGGIE'S KITCHEN



How does an artist portray holiness? The children in our tiny Sunday school know the answer to that one: a halo. Did people see a halo around Jesus' head when He walked among us? Did they see a halo on His mother Mary? on Peter or Paul? They know the answer to those questions, too -- "No" -- but they still insist that one must draw the haloes. After all, the holiness which the haloes represent is an essential, if ordinarily hidden, part of the picture, and in their judgement there's really no other way of getting the holiness into the picture.

We had been examining artistic renderings of Jesus' birth: an icon (with very correct haloes), a Rembrandt painting of the adoration of the shepherds, a sticker-book version of the same

event. I couldn't find my collection of old Christmas cards, so this last was the worst example I could lay my hands on. It did have one redeeming feature: like the Rembrandt, it showed the light which bathed everyone's faces as emanating from the Holy Infant. Unlike the Rembrandt, however, the sticker had the shepherds standing convivially around, their faces wreathed with sappy "Oh, what a cute baby" smiles. By contrast, Rembrandt's shepherds were on their knees, lost in adoration.

Still, the children weren't entirely satisfied. Among other things, where were the haloes for Mary and Joseph? I never expect young people (or older people, for that matter) to take to icons, which tend to be severe by our western standards. (The ones that "sell" are predictable -- Rublev's Holy Trinity with its pastel colouring, Christ as the Good Shepherd.) But these children's preference in the various portrayals of the Nativity of Christ was definitely the icon of the same, and not only because of the haloes. "Realism", I have discovered, is irrelevant to them -- in fact, it gets in the way of Reality, because it tells only part of the story.

I was thinking about all of this the other morning at Mass, how we usually see only the outer, earthly clothing of the Holy Mysteries, not their brilliant, searing Reality. God spares us from having too much of the latter vision, lest we die, but surely that vision should be our desire! How can we be satisfied with folksy "worship", with warm feelings of fellowship and hearty hymns-- with anything less, that is, than encounter with the Holy God? No doubt we prefer our "worship" to be "accessible" and "user-friendly". But the Mass, by its very nature, will not thus provide! Quite the other way around: It is the place where *God* accesses *us*, and where He makes us His friends who usually behave as if we were His enemies. In response, we can be sticker-book worshippers, talking about what a great Guy Jesus is (a lot of pop religious stuff is on this level). Or we can be like the shepherds, and later the magi, falling down in abject adoration before the Incarnate God.

When I was the age of these Sunday scholars, our parish observed the Epiphany as a festival of light. Now, so many years later, I'm aware of how little of the Divine Light I actually see, let alone reflect out into the world. Yet that Light remains eternally the Reality behind and beyond our earthly reality. I pray for the day when, with St John the Evangelist / the Divine / the Theologian, with shepherds and magi, I can join in saying, "We have beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father!"

For your Epiphany celebration, something easy from Lebanon, where being a Christian is anything but easy:

ZALABI HAF

A.k.a. doughnuts without holes, which in Lebanon are prepared on the Eve of the Epiphany. Soften 1 tsp dry yeast in 1 cup warm water. Sift 2-1/4 cups flour (500g) with 1 tsp salt; stir into yeast-water mixture, then knead, adding more water as necessary to form a light dough. Let rest one hour in a warm place. Heat 2 cups oil to 375 degrees in a wok or other wide, deep pan. Lightly stretch egg-size pieces of dough, then drop them into the hot oil. Fry till golden, turning once. Drain on paper towels. Serve when lukewarm or cold, either with honey or jam or tossed with sugar. (These, by the way, are remarkably similar to the doughboys made by some outpost Newfoundlanders from a bit of the day's batch of bread dough.)



"Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried."

The Paschal Mystery of Jesus, which comprises his passion, death, resurrection, and glorification, stands at the centre of the Christian faith because God's saving plan was accomplished once for all by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ.

Some of the leaders of Israel accused Jesus of acting against the law, the temple in Jerusalem, and in particular against faith in the one God because he proclaimed himself to be the Son of God. For this reason they handed him over to Pilate so that he might condemn him to death.

Jesus did not abolish the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai but he fulfilled it by giving it its definitive interpretation. He himself was the divine Legislator who fully carried out this Law. Furthermore, as the faithful Servant, he offered by means of his expiatory death the only sacrifice capable of making atonement for all the "transgressions committed by men under the first Covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus was accused of hostility to the temple. On the contrary, he venerated it as "the house of his Father" (John

2:16); and it was there that he imparted an important part of his teaching. However, he also foretold its destruction in connection with his own death and he presented himself as the definitive dwelling place of God among men.

Jesus never contradicted faith in the one God, not even when he performed the stupendous divine work which fulfilled the messianic promises and revealed himself as equal to God, namely the pardoning of sins. However, the call of Jesus to believe in him and to be converted makes it possible to understand the tragic misunderstanding of the Sanhedrin which judged Jesus to be worthy of death as a blasphemer.

Who is responsible for the death of Jesus? The passion and death of Jesus cannot be imputed indiscriminately either to all the Jews that were living at that time or to their descendants. Every single sinner, that is, every human being is really the cause and the instrument of the sufferings of the Redeemer; and the greater blame in this respect falls on those above all who are Christians and who the more often fall into sin or delight in their vices.

The death of Jesus was part of God's plan to reconcile to himself all who were destined to die because of sin. God took the loving initiative of sending his Son that he might give himself up for sinners. Proclaimed in the Old Testament, especially as the sacrifice of the Suffering Servant, the death of Jesus came about "in accordance with the Scriptures".

The entire life of Christ was a free offering to the Father to carry out his plan of salvation. He gave "his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45) and in this way he reconciled all of humanity with God. His suffering and death showed how his humanity was the free and perfect instrument of that divine love which desires the salvation of all people.

At the Last Supper with his apostles on the eve of his passion Jesus anticipated, that is, both symbolized his free self-offering and made it really present: "This is my Body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19), "This is my Blood which is poured out..." (Matthew 26:28) Thus he both instituted the Eucharist as the "memorial" (1 Corinthians 11:25) of his sacrifice and instituted his apostles as priests of the new covenant.

Despite the horror which death represented for the sacred humanity of Jesus "who is the Author of Life" (Acts 3:15), the human will of the Son of God remained faithful to the will of the Father for our salvation. Jesus accepted the duty to carry our sins in his Body "becoming obedient unto death" (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus freely offered his life as an expiatory sacrifice, that is, he made reparation for our sins with the full obedience of his love unto death. This love "to the end" (John 13:1) of the Son of God reconciled all of humanity with the Father. The paschal sacrifice of Christ, therefore, redeems humanity in a way that is unique, perfect, and definitive; and it opens up for them communion with God.

By calling his disciples to take up their cross and follow him Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who are to be its first beneficiaries.

Christ underwent a real death and a true burial. However, the power of God preserved his body from corruption. The "hell" into which Jesus descended was different from the hell of the damned. It was the state of all those, righteous and evil, who died before Christ. With his soul united to his divine Person Jesus went down to the just in hell who were awaiting their Redeemer so they could enter at last into the vision of God. When he had conquered by his death both death and the devil "who has the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14), he freed the just who looked forward to the Redeemer and opened for them the gates of heaven.

"And the third day he rose again according to the scriptures"

The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ and represents along with his cross an essential part of the Paschal Mystery.

Along with the essential sign of the empty tomb, the Resurrection of Jesus is witnessed to by the women who first encountered Christ and proclaimed him to the apostles. Jesus then "appeared to Cephas (Peter) and then to the Twelve. Following that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brethren at one time" (1 Corinthians 15:5-6) and to others as well. The apostles could not have invented the story of the resurrection since it seemed impossible to them. As a matter of fact, Jesus himself upbraided them for their unbelief.

While being an historical event, verifiable and attested by signs and testimonies, the Resurrection, insofar as it is the entrance of Christ's humanity into the glory of God, transcends and surpasses history as a mystery of faith. For this reason the risen Christ did not manifest himself to the world but to his disciples, making them his witnesses to the people.

The Resurrection of Christ was not a return to earthly life. His risen body is that which was crucified and bears the marks of his passion. However it also participates in the divine life, with the characteristics of a glorified body. Because of this the risen Jesus was utterly free to appear to his disciples how and where he wished and under various aspects.

The Resurrection of Christ is a transcendent work of God the Holy Trinity. The three Persons act together according to what is proper to them: the Father manifests his power; the Son "takes again" the life which he freely offered (John 10:17), reuniting his soul and his body which the Spirit brings to life and glorifies.

The Resurrection is the climax of the Incarnation. It confirms the divinity of Christ and all the things which he did and taught. It fulfills all the divine promises made for us. Furthermore the risen Christ, the conqueror of sin and death, is the principle of our justification and our Resurrection. It procures for us now the grace of filial adoption which is a real share in the life of the only begotten Son. At the end of time he will raise up our bodies.

"And ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father"

After forty days during which Jesus showed himself to the apostles with ordinary human features which veiled his glory as the Risen One, Christ ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father. He is the Lord who now in his humanity reigns in the everlasting glory of the Son of God and constantly intercedes for us before the Father. He sends us his Spirit and he gives us the hope of one day reaching the place he has prepared for us.

"And he shall come again with glory..."

How does the Lord Jesus now reign? As the Lord of the cosmos and of history, the Head of his Church, the glorified Christ mysteriously remains on earth where his kingdom is already present in seed and in its beginning in the Church. One day he will return in glory but we do not know the time. Because of this we live in watchful anticipation, praying "Come, Lord" (Revelation 22:20).

"to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end."

After the final cosmic upheaval of this passing world the glorious coming of Christ will take place. Then will come the definitive triumph of God in the parousia and the Last Judgment. Thus the Kingdom of God will be realized.

Christ will judge with the power he has gained as the Redeemer of the world who came to bring salvation to all. The secrets of hearts will be brought to light as well as the conduct of each one toward God and toward his neighbour. Everyone, according to how he has lived, will either be filled with life or damned for eternity. In this way, "the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13) will come about in which "God will be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).



Defending the Dignity of those with Dementia

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk

I once heard a remarkable story from a woman named Cecilia sitting next to me on a long flight.

She told me how her mother had suffered from dementia for many years, eventually reaching the point that she could no longer recognize any of her children when they would visit at the nursing home. She then changed the tone of the conversation immediately when she added, "But there's always someone in there." When I asked what she meant, she continued:

"I love singing, and as an African-American, I've got a strong voice. I sometimes visit nursing homes near my house just to sing for the patients, to do something different and break up their routine a little. I

still remember 12 years ago, I decided I would sing for my Mom. She didn't have a clue who I was, and didn't respond to much of anything, because the dementia was so advanced. She seemed almost catatonic. By chance I had come across one of her old hymnals with the Baptist songs we used to sing in church as kids. She used to know most of them by heart. Well, those old hymns stirred up something inside her, and after I started singing, she suddenly picked up and began to sing along with me! Yup, there's always someone in there."

Cecilia's story about her mother runs against a cultural tendency today, which is to dismiss those struggling with dementia as if they were no longer persons. These patients, however, clearly deserve much more from us than the kind of benign neglect (or worse) that they occasionally receive.

Many of us fear a diagnosis of dementia. We worry about "surrendering our core" or "losing our true self" to the disease. Many of us wonder how our loved ones would treat us under such circumstances.

Steven Sabat, writing in *The Journal of Clinical Ethics*, challenges the reduced expectations for quality care for those with dementia:

"Is his or her personhood recognized and supported, or neglected in favor of the assumption that it barely, if at all, exists do we assume that the afflicted rarely if ever recognizes the need for company, for stimulation, for the same sort of treatment he or she would seek and be given as a matter of course in earlier, healthier, days?"

Sometimes we may view the situation more from our own vantage point, rather than the patient's. In a report on care for the elderly, physicians Bernard Lo and Laurie Dornbrand put it this way: "Family members and health professionals sometimes project their own feelings onto the patient. Life situations that would be intolerable to young healthy people may be [made] acceptable to older debilitated patients."

Sabat notes how this raises the prospect of reducing the patient to a kind of object:

"The dementia sufferer is not treated as a person; that is, as one who is an autonomous center of life. Instead, he or she is treated in some respects as a lump of dead matter, to be measured, pushed around, manipulated, drained, filled, dumped, etc."

Those suffering from dementia challenge us in a particular way towards the beautiful, and at times heroic, response of love, "perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity."

The medical profession in particular faces a unique responsibility towards each individual with dementia, a duty to approach each life, especially in its most fragile (and uncooperative) moments, with compassion, patience and attention. When our ability to think rationally or choose freely becomes clouded or even eliminated by dementia, we still remain at root the kind of creature who is rational and free, and the bearer of inalienable human dignity. We never change from one kind of being into another. Parents who have children born with a serious birth defect or behavioral problem would never suggest that their defect or impediment transforms them into another kind of being, into an animal or a pet. It never renders them "subhuman," even though their behaviors, like those of advanced dementia patients, may at times be frustrating and very hard to bear. As Cecilia reminded me on the plane, "there's always someone in there."

Pope John Paul II in a beautiful passage from *Evangelium Vitae* (On the Gospel of Life) speaks of "the God of life, who has created every individual as a 'wonder.'" We are called to foster an outlook that "does not give in to discouragement when confronted by those who are sick, suffering, outcast or at death's door." Those suffering from dementia challenge us in a particular way towards the beautiful, and at times heroic, response of love, "perceiving in the face of every person a call to encounter, dialogue and solidarity."

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk earned a Ph.D. in Neuroscience from Yale University. Father Tad did post-doctoral research at Massachusetts General Hospital/ Harvard Medical School. He subsequently studied in Rome where he did advanced studies in theology and in bioethics. He is a priest of the diocese of Fall River, MA, and serves as the Director of Education at The National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk is a member of the advisory board of the Catholic Education Resource Center.

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The Authentic Transformation of "Useless" Human Suffering

Human beings naturally recoil at the prospect of pain and suffering. When a sharp object pokes us, we instinctively pull away. When the unpleasant neighbour comes up on caller ID, we recoil from answering the phone. Our initial response is to avoid noxious stimuli and pain, similar to most animals.

Yet when dealing with painful or unpleasant situations, we can also respond deliberately and in ways that radically differentiate us from the rest of the animal kingdom.

We can choose, for example, to confront and endure our pain for higher reasons. We know that a needle will hurt, but we decide to hold our arm still when getting an injection because our powers of reason tell us it will improve our health. We know the pain of talking to our difficult neighbour, but we figure that we should rise to the challenge and do it anyway, attempting to build peace in the neighbourhood.

We can also approach our pain and suffering in unreasonable ways, driven by worry and fear. When we suffer from a difficult relationship, we can turn to drugs, alcohol or binge-eating. When we suffer from the thought of continuing a pregnancy, we can terminate it by taking the life of our son or daughter by abortion. When we suffer from the pain of cancer, we can short-circuit everything by physician-assisted suicide.

How we decide to respond to suffering, whether rationally or irrationally, is one of the most important human choices we make. For many in our society, suffering has become a singular evil to be avoided at all costs, leading to many irrational and destructive decisions.

While physical pain is widespread in the animal world, the real difference for human beings is that we know we are suffering and we wonder why; and we suffer in an even deeper way if we fail to find a satisfactory answer. We need to know whether our suffering has meaning. From our hospital bed or wheelchair, we can hardly avoid the piercing question of "why," as grave sickness and weakness make us feel useless and even burdensome to others. In the final analysis, however, no suffering is "useless," though a great deal of suffering is lost or wasted because it is rejected by us, and we fail to accept its deeper meaning. Pope John Paul II often remarked that the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

In the field of Catholic healthcare, the question of suffering arises with regularity, and while the dedicated practice of medicine strives to lessen suffering and pain, it can never completely eliminate it. "Patients experiencing suffering that cannot be alleviated should be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering."

The very concept of "redemptive suffering" suggests that there is much more to human suffering than meets the eye, and that it is not simply an unmitigated evil from which we should instinctively flee. Rather, it is a mysterious force that can mold us in important ways and mature us, a force we ought to learn to work with and accept as part of our human journey and destiny.

Each of us, in our pain and suffering, can become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ. As children, we may have been taught those famous three words by our parents when pain and suffering would come our way: "Offer it up!" Those simple words served to remind us how our sufferings can benefit not only ourselves, but those around us in the mystery of our human communion with them. When we are immobilized in our hospital bed, we become like Christ, immobilized on the wood of the Cross, and powerful redemptive moments open before us, if we accept and embrace our own situation in union with Him.

Because of the personal love of the Lord towards us, we can in fact make a very real addition to His plan of salvation by uniting our sufferings to His saving Cross, just as a little child can make a very real addition to the construction of her mother's cake when she lovingly allows her to add the eggs, flour, and salt. While the mother could do it all unaided, the child's addition is real and meaningful, as the love of the mother meets the cooperation of the child to create something new and wonderful. In the same way, God permits our sufferings, offered up, to make an indelible mark in His work of Salvation. This transformation of the "uselessness" of our suffering into something profoundly meaningful serves as a source of spiritual joy to those who enter into it. For those who are in Christ, suffering and death represent the birth pangs of a new and redeemed creation. Our

sufferings, while never desirable in themselves, always point towards transcendent possibilities when we do not flee from them in fear.

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