

Corpus Christi

This is a special month for me in that it was ten years ago that I was diagnosed with skin cancer. I remember the time well. I was getting my hair cut and the barber point out a abnormal black spot on the back of my neck. I went to the doctor and after doing a skin biopsy, they told me I had stage II Melanoma. I am extremely grateful to have gone through the surgery and be cured.

I know that some of you have had cancer or are even battling cancer today. For those of you have had cancer or know someone who has, you know how difficult it is to receive that news. Hearing the big "C" word, you quickly realize the frailty of life and that you aren't invincible.

I did a little research on stats about cancer. These come from the American Cancer society. In 2019, it is estimated that 1.7 million people will be diagnosed with cancer. Over 600,000 people are expected to die from cancer this year, over 1,600 people each day.

Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US, exceeded only by heart disease. Thankfully, given the advances in modern medicine, survival rates have increased dramatically. In the United States alone, an estimated \$80.2 billion was spent in direct medical costs on cancer in 2015 (Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality).

Since my own diagnosis, I have said a prayer almost each day to St. Peregrine, who is the patron saint of cancer. I include the names of those I know who have cancer, asking if possible, for a cure.

In thinking about this terrible disease, I have thought, "What if they found a cure for cancer?" I imagine that it would be pretty expensive to obtain this cure at first. Assume it was \$100,000. And assume you had something like stage four IV pancreatic cancer. Would you pay that much for it? Obviously, that is a big number and many couldn't afford it, or if they could, it would set them back quite a bit.

Certainly, a good many with advanced stages would pay that kind of money. And think about what you're paying for – to extend your life for 10, 20, 30, or maybe even 40 years. Many would be willing to give a significant portion of their wealth for these added years.

In thinking about a potential cure, I can't help think about the great Gift of the Eucharist that we celebrate today, the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, or what we sometimes say, the "True Presence."

We have many names for the great gift of the Eucharist: The Bread of Angels; Holy Communion, the Most Blessed Sacrament; and one of my personal favorites, Medicine of Immortality.

This phrase comes from St. Ignatius, who was the bishop of Antioch in Syria just 40 years after the death of Christ. In the year 107, the Emperor Trajan condemned him to death because he refused to renounce the faith. He was taken to Rome where he would eventually be devoured by lions in a public spectacle.

On the way, St. Ignatius wrote seven letters to encourage Christians to live their faith and ask for their prayers. We still have these letters today. They can easily be found online.

In his letter to the Ephesians, he refers to the Eucharist as the “medicine of immortality.” He says the Eucharist is the antidote to prevent us from dying, but [which causes] that we should live forever in Jesus Christ (chapter 20). In other words, it is the cure for what we call the “second death” or eternal separation from God.

This is a pause for reflection. Medicine. The Eucharist heals. It is a cure for sickness. Sin causes sickness. Or to return to the disease of cancer, sin is like a cancer that attacks our ability to love.

Cancer is when abnormal cells begin rapidly multiplying and spread into surrounding tissues. They can form into tumors. If it is checked or removed, these cells eventually take over the body. Surgery, Chemotherapy, and radiation are needed to remove the unhealthy cells.

Speaking spiritually, the Sacrament of Confession or Reconciliation is like the surgery. The penitent is honest by presenting the sin or cancer, and Jesus, the divine physician, removes the harm.

The Eucharist, for its part, is like the chemotherapy or radiation. The Catholic catechism reminds us that the Eucharist wipes away venial sin – things like bad language, gossip, unhealthy criticism, white lies, jealousy, laziness, un-forgiveness, etc.

Additionally, the Eucharist prevents us from committing mortal sin. In this way, it is like an antibiotic or a vaccine. These things help prevent you from getting sick.

And even more wonderful, the Eucharist is medicine for immorality. As we know, advances in knowledge, technology, and medicine have drastically improved chances of cures of dreaded diseases like cancer. But they can't prevent the greatest disease of all, death.

The Eucharist – the Body and Blood of Jesus – or the true Presence of Jesus that we celebrate today – is the remedy for the great tragedy of death. We will still die physically, but not the second death. If you have the medicine of the Eucharist – the Gift of Jesus in you – you will rise again.

The best news of all – it is not \$100,000. It is a gift. It is free. However, we know it came at a great cost – the self-gift of Jesus. What Jesus asks in return is love, your love, your heart, which only you can give. The other day I was thinking, "Why does my love even matter Jesus?" And I got this response, "Because it is *your* love that is unique to you. No one else can give this love back to Jesus. He wants your love, which is unique to you. He delights in your love."

Practically speaking, what does this mean? First, please find little ways to express your gratitude and your love to Jesus. For example, it would be wonderful if you could come in a few minutes before Mass begins. To kneel down and prepare for Mass – to pray, “Jesus, thank you for the gift of being here. I love you. Open my heart and help me prepare to receive the gift of the Eucharist.”

Second, the Church asks you to make a little head bow before receiving the Eucharist – to acknowledge the true presence of Jesus. When I or an extraordinary minister says, “The Body of Christ,” give a good Amen! This means, “I believe” or “it is true.” This is your act of faith that Jesus is present, no less present than He was 2,000 years ago as He walked on the seashore of Galilee.

Finally, take a little time after receiving the Eucharist to say thank you in your pew. The treasure given you is more valuable than the entire universe because it is God Himself. We teach our children good manners – to say please and thank you. We are children of God. Good manners are essential. It’s important to say “Thank you Jesus” for your gift. Help me put your love in action – to live the Eucharist outside of St. Therese.

This weekend, we give thanks to God for Jesus in the Eucharist – this medicine that helps us with our sickness, and this hope of immortality – life with Christ for all eternity.