



## Life Issues Forum

### The Importance of Being a Cheerleader

By Theresa Notare, MA

Everybody needs a cheerleader. We all need someone who can give us encouragement when we feel like giving up, who can remind us of who we are when we want to “sell out,” who can even “carry” us a bit when we just can’t go on. In life, having a cheerleader is important to our well being.

The sick and the suffering are in special need of cheerleaders. I’ve been reminded of this for very personal reasons. I have had two surgeries, both of which required a lengthy convalescence. During that time, I must admit I was shocked at my response to physical impairment. I found myself constantly on the edge of giving in to despair.

Prior to those surgeries, I had never had any health problem – in fact, I hardly ever got sick. Not that I had no experience with illness. Helping the suffering is almost a family trait. I remember my mother taking my siblings and me along with her as she helped sick or grieving friends and family.

But once I became sick myself, it was a very different matter. As an “infirm person” I could not take care of myself without family and friends to help me. More importantly, without them I would not have resisted the temptation to despair.

When serious suffering hits one’s life, it is like an internal emotional earthquake. It is all the person can think of. Whether that suffering is news of a terminal illness or a “crisis” pregnancy, it can drag you into terrible darkness and be destructive – or it can be uplifting and transformative. My run-in with the limits of my own body has made me more aware of this. I have found myself thinking about the necessity of really “loving thy neighbor,” of being a support for others. I have also found myself reflecting on the Passion of Christ. What was it like for him to suffer so greatly? Like us, was he tempted to despair? We know he was. Witness the “Agony in the Garden.” We know he had the strength to say to the Father, “not my will but yours.” Then new temptations awaited him on the cross.

I like to think that on the cross, when Jesus was in the depth of his suffering, he looked upon his mother and friends and they inspired him. They may have played a much more important role than we know in being there for him. Although John and the women were probably confused,

definitely suffering themselves, they were also undoubtedly, loving Jesus from where they stood. And love, being what it is, supported him. Maybe their presence teaches us something about the importance of supporting others in their suffering – of being cheerleaders, especially in the darkest hours. That’s an awesome role. It’s the most important role we may play in the life of a scared pregnant girl, or a family facing the special needs of a disabled child or a patient dealing with terminal illness – if we are there to see and respond to their needs.

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