

My Advent Journey with Gall Stones

I was not aware that a part of my body had been asking for attention for most of November, much less which part. Early November had included trips to Saratoga, Dingmans Ferry, PA, Eastern Columbia County & NYC. The week before Thanksgiving included a funeral at the Cathedral in Albany, & a wake and funeral in Middleburgh. I was tired, but thought it was just because of the travel and ministry.

On Thanksgiving morning I preached and presided at Mass at Our Lady of Fatima in Delanson. After that, Sr. Anna and I picked up Stasia, an older member of our weekly contemplative prayer group, and went to the community thanksgiving dinner at Our Lady of the Valley in Middleburgh. Anna and I planned to go to my sister, Barbara's for dessert after the dinner. However, right after the meal (of which I could barely eat half), I was overcome with chills and fever. We took our friend home, then cancelled our dessert plans. I tried to get warm, and took my temperature. I was running a low grade fever, so I went to bed.

During the night, my temperature spiked to 104°. In the morning, I called my doctor in Middleburgh. He was not available, but the office sent me to Schoharie, 4 miles away, to see Dr. Luz, who had been my primary care physician in the '90's. He examined me and surprised me by saying I needed to go to the local hospital immediately.

Anna took me to Bassett Hospital in Cobleskill, stopping briefly in Middleburgh for my C-Pap machine and a change of underwear. I spent Friday night there. The first diagnosis was of a bladder infection or urinary tract infection. Fr Matt Wetsel, the pastor in Middleburgh, stopped on Sat afternoon. He anointed me with the Sacrament of the Sick and brought Communion.

The high fever broke during the night, but my temperature did not stay at normal. It rose back to around 102° the next day. This indicated that there was something else going on, so I was kept overnight on Saturday. On Sunday evening, I had a CT scan to look at the organs involved and gall stones were discovered. It was a sign of our global connection that the test was sent over the internet to Australia and the results were back in a half hour.

The doctor wanted to transport me to Cooperstown Medical Center that night, but I said I could not go until the next day. On Monday, I was transported by ambulance to the main facility of the Bassett Hospital system in Cooperstown, NY, about an hour's drive. Anna followed, driven be a friend from our prayer group.

I waited in the ER for almost 7 hours - and was given a sonogram while I was there. I finally got a room around 8 PM. Tests were scheduled for the next day - and I was constantly monitored. On Tuesday, I received an MRI (It felt like a ride on Space Mountain) in place of an "ERCP", an invasive test that would require anesthesia, with the expectation that I would have surgery on Wednesday.

Right after the MRI the doctors shocked me when they said they were ready for surgery. That afternoon they took out my gall bladder. I spent the night on Tues, expecting that I would be discharged on Wed, but two of my blood tests showed high levels of the wrong substances, so they kept me until Thursday, while taking and testing my blood again.

On Thursday, Dec. 4th, I was discharged. I had been in two hospitals for a week, but it felt like at least a month. On Tuesday and Wednesday nights, Anna stayed in a house run by the hospital and was brought to my room, or the recovery room by security. She had been transported by friends to Cooperstown on Mon & Tues. We were both picked up by friends from Middleburgh on Thursday.

The task of cooperating in my healing included changing the dressing on the surgical scar, taking frequent naps, paying close attention to what I ate and several follow up appointments with my doctor and a member of the surgical team.

Advent was truly a time of waiting and of resting in the Lord, as well as listening closely to my body and to my friends. I celebrated my first public Mass on Christmas Eve at Our Lady of Fatima parish in Delanson, and was able to have Christmas Dinner - including dessert - at my sister Barbara's home.