



Ladies & Gentlemen

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your prayers and Masses for my recovery as well as for all of the cards that you have sent to me that have been a real help in passing the time cooped up in the rectory.

Also, just as was done several weeks ago I would like to give you an update on where things stand.

This coming Tuesday I will have my second appointment with the Infectious Disease Specialists at Sentara Norfolk Hospital. Hopefully the report will be as positive as at the previous meeting.

Hospital testing and subsequent testing while here at the rectory has confirmed that I have an infection of streptococcus canis in the disks of the spine which has also resulted in an abscess. Some “strep” organisms are normally found on the bodies of humans and animals and do not normally cause disease infections. Others may cause disease (sometimes severe) in both people and humans. Under certain circumstances these bacteria can cause opportunistic infections. Transfer from animal to human is highly unlikely, but obviously it happens. It is even more unusual to find this infection in the spinal column. According to the stream of medical personnel that passed through my room they found it a rare enough occurrence to declare I was an oddity. I’m not really sure if they were referring to my infection or to me. I’ll let you all to determine that.

Almost all dogs and cats carry this bacteria on their skin and in saliva. A cautionary note, please wash your hands after playing with your pets. Also, do not allow them to lick your face or open wounds.

I am still receiving daily doses of antibiotics through a PICC Line.

Hopefully, the meeting with the doctors this week will be positive which would mean that I can plan on returning around Nov. 9.

Once again thank you so much for your prayers and concern they have been most welcome and beneficial.

Totally unrelated point. Apparently once again my email contacts has been jacked. If you receive any email from [frbrian@gmail.com](mailto:frbrian@gmail.com) do not open it and delete the message. I have never had a Gmail account and I am not in desperate need of some emergency assistance or trapped in Gaum and need financial assistance to get back to Tidewater.

Yes, this edition of the Meanderings is a lot shorter than normal. In the future there will be more information on a variety of topics related to liturgy and Church teachings. As in the past these are meant to be an adjunct to the education opportunities provided here at St. Stephen’s.

God Bless

### **SUNDAY REFLECTION**

We live in an image-laden world. We talk about organizations getting a ‘new image’. Political parties employ ‘spin doctors’. Products and companies are ‘re-branded.’ Advertising can change our buying habits, our perceptions of ourselves, our bodies, our politics, and even our religions. In a world of constant ‘communications’ there is a premium on being able to make things appear genuine, attractive, wholesome, and good. And for many that is the key demand: appearance. It might be good, but it must appear good; it might not be all it’s cracked up to be, but so long as it is branded properly and marketed well, then who cares?

A newspaper owner once said that when legend replaces fact, then print legend. Another told his editor that selling papers was his business, not news. This is the world of The Lie, where reality is in the background and perception is all that matters.

We as believers in a Creator have the task of challenging The Lie: reality is our business because it comes from God and will return to God, and we shall be asked about our stewardship.

Getting behind appearance is, however, always difficult, and it always has been. We have to constantly pull ourselves up to make sure that we see beneath the glittering images that strike our senses and which can deceive us. This is the wisdom captured in the proverb; “Don’t judge a book by its cover” – the problem is that most of us do just that more often than we like to admit and this is proven by the fact that giving a book ‘hype’ works time and again in promoting its sale.

This task of not being taken in by illusions that we know is important in our everyday lives: we do not want to be fooled, conned, or cheated. But it is also a Christian task for we proclaim the Christ to be The Truth. Taking issue with hype and deception is part of our witness to the truth. Making sure that we are not engaged in deceptions is a basic of Christian discipleship.

Today’s Gospel, as it should always, challenges us at several levels.

First, there is the reality that we are immersed in a world of icons and brands, labels and styles. The very model of the devout follower of the Law is the Pharisee. The very model of the ‘bad guy’ is the Tax Collector. In the world of stereotypes and images we are to admire the first and condemn the second. But God acts at the level of truth, not the level of stereotypes and manufactured expectations.

Second, there is the contrast between external religiosity and a genuine desire to have a relationship with God. The two should go together, but just as a brand may have high appeal and not be the genuine article, so too with religion. But God does not dwell at the level of external and human display.

Third, there is the contrast between self-deception and self-knowledge. We can so easily con ourselves into believing our own propaganda without being aware of our faults and needs. We are all in need of greater integrity and of God’s mercy.

We claim to be the people of “The Way’, we claim to follow the way, the truth, and the life.’ This is a call to integrity, self-knowledge, and humility: these are not virtues that come naturally to us as beings who love our senses. But there are the virtues that will bring us life with God



**STEWARDSHIP:** Both the first reading and today's psalm say clearly that the Lord hears the cry of the poor. Have I been given the gifts – of time or money or abilities – to be the means by which God answers their need?

Pope St. John XXIII

“It is not true that some human beings are by nature superior and others inferior. All men are equal in their natural dignity.”

Pope St. Pius X

“The equality existing among the various social members consists only in this: that all men have their origin in God the Creator, have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and are to be judged and rewarded or punished by God exactly according to their merits or demerits.”

### **READINGS THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY**

**3 NOV '19**

**Wis. 11:22-12:2:** This reading shows us an omnipotent, loving God, mindful of all His creation, a God who guides and protects us, but who also calls on us to repent.

**2 Thes. 1:11-2:3:** Paul writes to encourage the Thessalonian believers distressed at the death of some of their number, and he prays that they may be worthy of God's call.

**Lk. 19:1-10:** The thoroughgoing conversion of Zacchaeus, the tax-collector set radical standards for the Christian disciple.

Blaise Pascal

“Do little things as if they were great, because of the majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells in thee.”



*"Too many people get credit for being good, when they are only being passive. They are too often praised for being broadminded when they are so broadminded they can never make up their minds about anything."  
Fulton J. Sheen*