

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners,

One of the things I like to do for relaxation is to watch movies. It is important to be selective of course, what with all the trash being produced. A good resource for finding worth while films is at the U.S. Bishops' website at www.usccb.org/movies/index. There they have reviews of both new and old movies. They will also tell you about objectionable content and how the movie was rated.

Last week I rented a movie called "*The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*." The movie was made in France and tells the true story of a popular magazine publisher who suffered a stroke in his forties and was left completely paralyzed. He saw and heard everything going on around him but he couldn't move a muscle except for blinking his left eye. One of his therapists worked with him in spelling words and creating sentences by going through the alphabet and having the paralyzed man blink when she said the letter he wanted to use to spell words. This obviously required that both the man and his therapist had to have great patience. The man actually wrote a book about his experience of paralysis this way and it was that book that was the basis of the movie.

It was an inspiring movie in many ways, and except for a few brief and unnecessary "problematic" scenes it was a pretty good film, I was particularly struck by how the movie opens. The movie begins with the man waking up from a stroke induced coma and gradually realizing that he is paralyzed. The movie was filmed in such a way that the viewer actually sees everything from the paralyzed man's eyes. It is difficult to watch for a while as people are constantly moving in and out of the man's vision.

But that's what struck me. It is a challenge **to** see the world through another person's eyes and that challenge is even greater when the person is suffering. What would it be like to be totally paralyzed and only able to blink for communication?

A further complication in trying to understand what another person is suffering is that most of us don't really want to. We instinctively back away from someone else's pain, even that of our loved ones. In the movie the man's mistress (its French custom it seems) will not come to visit because she cannot bear to look at him paralyzed.

It's a survival response I guess. Consciously, or perhaps more often unconsciously, we think to ourselves "I've got just about as much trouble as I can stand right now and I can't take on anyone else's."

We think to ourselves that we are not strong enough to carry another person's burdens. And we are right, by ourselves, we cannot.

However, with the strength that comes from Him who carries all our burdens, we can in fact share the suffering of others. It's part of what Jesus means when He says "love one another as I have loved you."

So if you have a family member or friend who is suffering, don't be afraid of their pain. Pray for them and pray for yourself that with the strength that comes from the Lord you may be a messenger of His compassion for them.

Much of the suffering in this world is either self-inflicted or imposed on us by others doing evil. Other forms of suffering are simply the result of the fact that we are not home yet. We were created for Heaven and this isn't it. As a result of original sin we must experience physical death before we pass into the glory of the next life.

But whatever the cause of our suffering it can make us better persons if we accept it without losing our faith in God's love for us. We can unite our suffering to that of Christ and ask God to use it for His purposes. Our suffering can also teach us to be sensitive to the sufferings of others and to reach out to them in compassion.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley