Inspiring all with her deep faith in God

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Tags: Catholic Schools, Featured
More than seven months after suffering paralysis in a backyard accident, Mary Maloney is back in school. She is improving physically, and firmly believes that God will restore her health.

The eighth grader returned this week to the cheers of her classmates at Blessed Francis Seelos Academy in Wexford. She had been away to do extended therapy at rehabilitation hospitals in Philadelphia and Louisville, Kentucky.

Mary was jumping on a trampoline last August when she landed on her head and neck, leaving her unable to feel or move anything from the chest down. Doctors diagnosed it as a spinal stroke. The road to recovery has been difficult, but the family has received strong spiritual support.
“Our faith is everything,” said Mary’s mother, Pam Surano. “It’s an attack of infirmity, and we’re attacking it back through the Holy Spirit.”

Last fall, Mary told her mom that she heard God’s voice, and asked her to write down His words:

“God told me, Mary, in order for me to heal you, you must stay faithful and believe that I will. Do not forget that I will heal you. Your faith will allow me to perform a miracle and heal you. Then you can tell everyone and they will know my work and turn to me.”

Their pastor, Father Will Wuenschel of Saint Aidan Parish, visited Mary during her rehab in Philadelphia and Louisville. He said the family’s faith has been extraordinary and is already changing hearts.

“People have told me, ‘We haven’t prayed or even thought about God for a long time, but we’re praying for Mary,’” Father Wuenschel said.

“She has been a great example to everyone of perseverance and trust.”

Nicole Maxwell, Mary’s language arts teacher at Seelos Academy, said students and faculty had been praying that she would be strong enough to come back and graduate with her classmates.

“There was just a genuine outpouring of love and support when Mary returned on Tuesday,” Maxwell said. “She has never wavered in her faith and the students have found strength and comfort through her belief that God has a plan.”

Mary’s mother said they are heartened by the progress she made during their five months away from home.
“She now has feeling in her legs, and can get her foot and toes to move,” Surano said. “She’s also regaining core strength. Her abdomen muscles are beginning to activate, which is crucial to walking. And she can do pushups and sit ups, which for someone with C-7 to T-5 paralysis, is amazing.”

Much more physical therapy is ahead, along with many more prayers. Friends formed a “Miracles for Mary” group to help pay medical bills and research new treatments. New plans are in the works.

“Mary wants to return to altar serving, and she hopes to attend North Catholic High School in the fall,” Surano said.

“The Holy Spirit is powerful, and there's nothing God cannot do.”
With teacher Nicole Maxwell and new puppy, Buddy

Father Will Wuenschel visits with Mary at Seelos Academy

Pedaling therapy in Philadelphia
In therapy back home with former Steeler Jon Kolb

Mary's school family welcomes her back to Seelos Academy
Fr. Jones: Easter joys

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Categories: Columns
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By Father Richard S. Jones
Chaplain, UPMC Mercy Hospital

During Holy Week, I experienced a tremendous mix of emotions at the funeral of a priest friend, held in St. Mary of the Mount Church – now part of Mary, Queen of Peace Parish — on Mount Washington.

I wept ‘tears of sorrow’ at the loss of a friend who had lived his priesthood in such a humble, simple, non-judgmental, and loving way. I felt ‘tears of gratitude’ for his priestly dedication, his witness when he was a Christian Brother, for the way he found biblical serenity in the mystical aspects of martial arts, for his faithful friendship, and his uncommon goodness. I also cried ‘tears of joy,’ relieved that his bouts of cancer treatment, multiple strokes, dementia, and the isolation of a nursing home during a global pandemic are now lifted.

His Easter had arrived a few days early. And, like the one we all just celebrated, it is not one moment or one day. It continues without end.
The assurance of faith echoed in my heart: God will give you the grace you need to carry your cross—be sure of this. My friend is now free from the tomb, with no more restrictions. Pain and suffering are not a cruel and meaningless fate, but preparation for an eternal reward: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us.” (Romans 8:18)

Easter joy does not invalidate sorrow. When Jesus stood by the tomb of his beloved friend Lazarus, John 11:35 tells us that, “Jesus began to weep.” As a chaplain at UPMC Mercy Hospital, I had recently found insight about sorrow in Jesus, Friend of My Soul, by Sister Joyce Rupp:

“Grieving is a healthy, human response to the pain of no longer having someone or something significant. Weeping does not indicate a lack of faith. There is nothing unholy about having a good cry to express our sorrow. When we grieve, we show tenderness for our broken heart. This virtue aids our healing process. As we weep, we also unite compassionately with others whose shattered hearts fill the world with endless tears.”

Death gives birth to new life.

My friend’s funeral was on an Easter-like day, with abundant sunshine, spring temperatures, blue skies, a gentle breeze, and serene peacefulness. The liturgy was a call to love, to care, to connect, and to share with others through Gospel witnessing, according to our vocation. Greatness does not lie in income but in the impact we make on others. Greatness does not lie in special uniforms or lofty titles: it lies in being willing to serve and self-sacrifice for our brothers and sisters. Greatness does not lie in making a name for oneself but in keeping a place in your heart for the sufferings of others.

The centerpiece of the Christian faith is our belief that Jesus rose from the dead, demonstrating that life continues beyond this world. This world is a place of gestation toward something higher, more permanent, and more splendid.
Easter is not just one day, or even the 50 days of the Easter season that will continue until Pentecost. We renew our Easter faith each week when the Christian community gathers on the Lord’s Day to worship, to pray, and to proclaim the Good News of our salvation in Jesus Christ. Every Sunday is a “little Easter.”

At the end of each Sunday Mass, we are to carry forth Easter graces, as the first apostles did. The word *apostle* means “one who is sent”— sent to your family, your workplace, the people in your life, the world. Jesus is sending you to all of them to bring the grace, the blessing, the light, and the fruits of the Mass. It is never too late for God to invigorate and revitalize a soul, a church, and the world.

After my friend’s funeral, I returned to my ministry of tending the sick and the dying. I felt lifted-up, despite the loss of a friend. I found myself singing for Easter joy, despite the sting of death. I sensed the presence of the saints and angels, a community of love, rejoicing that a hometown son is now — Home!

His funeral had been a true celebration, the perfect prelude to the sacred Triduum. Remembering the breathtaking view from the church atop Mount Washington, I imagined what my friend was seeing in the New Jerusalem. In the words of St. Paul, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no heart has imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9)
Protecting our children

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April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, an important time for Catholic parishes and schools to highlight how they are keeping God’s children safe.

In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, 32,574 volunteers and staff have clearances and are trained in child abuse prevention, according to Phyllis Haney, secretary for the Secretariat for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults.

“Everyone who is an employee or volunteer learns what child abuse is and how to stop it,” Haney said. “They also must have three clearances and have no record that disqualifies them from working with children.”

The PA State Police Criminal Record Check, PA Child Abuse History Clearance and FBI Fingerprint Clearance or volunteer waiver must be kept on file and renewed every five years. Staff and volunteers also are required to follow the diocesan Pastoral Code of Conduct, especially on how to behave around children and vulnerable adults.
“We go above and beyond state law, requiring everyone who has contact with children in their ministry to take mandated reporter training,” Haney said. “They might suspect or recognize abuse, but they also need to know how to report it.”

The blue pinwheel is the national symbol of child abuse prevention efforts, said Laetitia Bridges, diocesan director of Victims Assistance Ministries.

“It represents the innocence, joy and fun that should be the experience of all children,” she said.

Bridges is the first point of contact for anyone who comes forward to allege abuse by clergy. She said the people she has spoken with were abuse between 20 and 50 years ago.

“We don’t ever want to forget those who have been harmed,” Bridges said. “It only makes us more determined to raise awareness and continue to improve how we protect the vulnerable.”

Parishes are encouraged to tap into resources offered by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for creative ways to communicate their support to survivors of sexual abuse, and help educate parishioners on how to continue to protect children.

Anyone who has suffered any abuse at the hands of clergy is asked to contact Bridges at 412-456-3093 or lbridges@diopitt.org.

Child abuse prevention tips are available at https://www.usccb.org/committees/communications-abuse-prevention-resources.
Thankful for the chance to help others

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Deacon Rick Caruso has a friend who came into an unexpected financial windfall. She wasn't sure exactly what to do with the money, but she knew that other people needed it more than she did.

“She’s not a parishioner but knew I was involved in different causes in my ministry, and she wanted me to help others who were in need,” Deacon Caruso said.

Over the past year, the anonymous donor has given several thousand dollars.

The funds have gone to help people served by Stephen Ministry and the Saint Vincent de Paul Society at Saint John Neumann, Assumption and Sacred Heart parishes near Pittsburgh.

“I was really overwhelmed by her generosity,” Deacon Caruso said.

Stephen Ministers offer care to people who are hurting, often going through a crisis or difficulty in life.
“They try to be Jesus’ hands, feet and heart,” Deacon Caruso said, “helping people move forward in their journeys.”

Often times those receiving help have experienced a loss in their lives—loss of a job, a loved one, or independence due to health or other challenges.

Stephen Ministers offer a caring Christian presence, providing support as they use their gifts in meaningful ministry. Parishes carry out Christ’s commandment to “Love one another as I have loved you” in a powerful and practical way.

The unexpected funds also have benefited those assisted by the Saint Vincent de Paul Society, which provides rent, food, utility bills, clothing, furniture and other items to those in need. Thrift stores sell donated goods at a low price, helping to raise money.

The first Saint Vincent de Paul conference in Pittsburgh was established in 1852, less than two decades after the lay Catholic organization was founded in France.

Deacon Caruso has told his friend where her funds have gone, and many of those receiving assistance have written her, expressing gratitude for her compassion.

“She is just a very generous person who is acting out of kindness to help people,” Deacon Caruso said.

“In a way it’s a social justice issue,” he said, “treating the poor with dignity, looking to see what their needs are, asking how to help address them, and acting on that without hesitation.

“Every time she gives me money, she thanks me for the opportunity to serve other people.”
Remembrance, Healing, & Renewal

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By Father Matthew Hawkins
Parochial vicar, St. Mary Magdalene and St. Benedict the Moor parishes, Pittsburgh

In the early days of the Coronavirus pandemic we faced the unimaginable. Our houses of worship were shuttered and the very essence of what it means to be “a community of faith” seemed to be in jeopardy. We wondered, How could we remain a community if we could not physically gather in public space? How could we remain a community if we could not raise our voices in song with one another and share the breath of life? How could we remain a community if we could not have a meal that we shared in common?

We looked around, but the future seemed desolate. We had become the bare skeletons of what we once had been. We were reminded of the verse from the ancient prophet Ezekiel (37:1-14): “The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out ... and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. He caused me to pass among them and behold, there were very many on the surface of the
valley; and lo, they were very dry. He said to me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ And I answered, ‘O Lord GOD, You know.’

The world around us seemed like dry bones. It was a time of fear and doubt; only the Lord could answer the question that was in all of our hearts: Can we be revived as a people? Can we be renewed as a community of faith? There was hope, yet that hope was like the faint glow of a lamp in the distance. We wondered whether or not the glow of hope was real or if it was merely wishful thinking arising from our imagination. Then we remembered the words of the 23rd Psalm: “He restores my soul.”

With this promise of deliverance, we began the long and painful process of coming back together and returning as a community. Our initial steps were timid and uncertain. Our confidence was slow in coming. We knew that if we were to be restored, it would require singleness of focus; the clouds that obscured the light in our souls had to be swept away.

With the Psalmist we cried out: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence and do not take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation …” (51:10-12).

Gradually, painfully, we picked up steam. Though the elders in our community were shut-in, their spirits were undiminished. Though the youth of our community grew restless and some began to lose their way, the patience and the discipline they had learned from ancient wisdom proved to be the elixir for the times of trouble they faced today. The prophet Isaiah once proclaimed: “Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.” (40:30-31).
While clouds remain on the horizon, much of what we feared has been dispersed. The light of faith, and hope, and charity breaks through the darkness. We do not walk depending on our own power; we walk leaning on the arm of God. But walk, we will. Walk we must. Like the words of the Negro Spiritual we are inspired to sing: “Sometimes I feel discouraged, and deep I feel the pain. In prayers the holy spirit revives my soul again” (There is a Balm in Gilead).

Where once we seemed to be facing endless physical separation, we are now increasingly able to worship together as a community of faith. Health and safety precautions, along with the development of effective vaccines, have restored our social ministries and public worship, and even during the darkest days of the pandemic, people of faith volunteered their time and energies to take care of the elders and the homebound. The trails of the pandemic, rather than breaking our spirit, have brought out the best in us.

By the grace of God we can now look out over what was once a field of desolation and answer God’s question to Ezekiel about whether or not those bare bones shall live once again. We raise our voices like a heavenly choir and we sing in gratitude with the Psalmist of old: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Psalm 103:1-5).
New leaders named

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Bishop David Zubik has announced the appointments of three people to senior leadership positions in diocesan central administration, effective April 1, 2021.

Robert Costantino was named Chief Financial Officer, succeeding David Misch. Costantino has 28 years of experience in major manufacturing and for-profit higher education, with a diversified background in financial management, strategic planning, forecasting and oversight.

Costantino is a parishioner at Saint Philip Parish in Crafton. He and wife Trish have three children.

The diocese’s new Chief Facilities Officer is Chuck Goetz, who replaces Paul Iurlano. Most recently he worked as business manager at four parishes—Saint Kilian in Adams/Cranberry townships, Holy Sepulcher in Glade Mills, Divine Mercy in downtown Pittsburgh and Saint Aidan in Wexford.

Goetz and his wife Cindy are the parents of four children and members of Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish in Glenshaw.

Deacon Kevin Lander has a new title to match the responsibilities he has been handling for several months—Chief Operating Officer. He supervises Benefits/Insurance and Payroll, Human Resources, Information Technology, Auditors and Diocesan Real Estate.
Prior to joining the diocese in 2013, he was Senior Vice President in charge of Enterprise ATM Services for U.S. Bank. At the diocese, he has served as Director of Operations and Information Technology, and Associate General Secretary.

Deacon Lander and his wife Maureen have three children. In addition to his staff responsibilities, he is assigned to Saint Raphael the Archangel Parish in Carnegie/Green Tree/Scott.