

May 11, 2010

Dear Family and Friends,

I'm overwhelmed with your prayers and the prayers of others for me and George on the Malta pilgrimage to Lourdes. It was an experience that I can only now put into words. The journey began on December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, when Dame Jan Parry en route to California was prompted to invite us on the Lourdes pilgrimage with the Knights and Dames of Malta. She explained that the organization brings serious and chronically ill patients on pilgrimage to Lourdes each year all expenses paid.

The priest at the first of two meditations of the pilgrimage told us that we were there at the invitation of Jesus and His mother Mary. Our Lady of Lourdes, identified herself at the 15<sup>th</sup> apparition to St. Bernadette with the words *I am the Immaculate Conception*. It was on that feast day Janet answered Our Lady's call to invite us to her side. I hadn't made that connection until writing this reflection.

At the time I didn't feel like a worthy candidate since I'd been treatment free for almost three years. By mid January worthiness was achieved as three months of chemotherapy loomed. The week of the first treatment I received notice of acceptance as a malade. Now confident of my place I was happy to be going on pilgrimage to Lourdes with the Malta organization.

Eleven years ago I could point to three miracles we personally received on a parish trip to Lourdes. In fact we could say four miracles as against all odds I am still here to recount the event. This time was different. This miracle was the upheaval of seeing lives surrendered during a week of true humility, hearts turned inside out, Jesus alive in each person. We witnessed 400 pilgrims touched by the love of God in the most healing ways. The supernatural life became evident with every encounter whether person to person or with Our Lady at the Grotto and Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Generosity and charity abounded on a large scale. The wealthiest of the wealthy humbled themselves in servitude. Captains of industry pulled

voitures from the hotel, up the hill, across the bridge and down the hill, to and from the Domain where the Grotto, basilicas, and other holy places are situated. Doctors and nurses of every specialty and clergy were on call at all times to attend to our medical and spiritual needs.

The meeting for the caregivers gave George the opportunity to understand his grieving that has taken place too often over the 13 years of my illness. The insight that he shared helped me understand the psychological difficulty I experienced during my recent treatments and subsequent two night hospital stay. Truth is I am a malade in denial as I don't attach the word cancer to my life. By mid point of the pilgrimage I accepted that transportation by voiture was the right place for me to be. As Our Lady of Lourdes would have it by the end of the seven days the sick and their caregivers who reluctantly arrived emotionally and physical traumatized were overwhelmed with love and radiantly transformed.

At dinner on Saturday an empty chair at the table of six was occupied with an answer to a prayer. When Melissa dropped us off at the airport she asked if we'd speak to doctors willing and able to help with a diocesan bioethics program she is developing. Several Knights on the trip are renowned ethicists. Earlier that day I prayed to Our Lady of Lourdes to meet a particular one. She sent us Dr. John Haas founder of the National Catholic Bioethics Center who has graciously offered to help with the project.

Another person at that same table was Dr. George Isajiw, past president of the Catholic Medical Association. He related the story of his grandfather who was a Catholic priest in the Ukrainian Church, a theologian, seminary professor and author of several books in the Ukraine. His mother's father was murdered by the KGB and has been elevated to blessed by Pope John Paul II. Pray for us Blessed Konrad, Holy Martyr.

On Sunday the Eucharistic procession was followed by Adoration and Benediction in the massive underground basilica. A sea of Knights and Dames of Malta from all over the world in their formal robes and capes and veils surrounded rows of malades in wheelchairs, voitures and on stretchers. At the lifting of the huge monstrance the glory of Jesus Christ reigned supreme. Gazing at Him through tears of gold only two words came to mind *Jesus heals*. This became my mantra and was the essence and highlight of our pilgrimage.

On May 3 your names and prayer intentions were placed at the Grotto where Mary appeared and miracles happen. Please believe that many graces are flowing from Our Lady of Lourdes for you. I felt your presence with me each time I visited the Grotto and thanked God for placing you in our lives.

God loves you and so do we!

Andrea and George