

December 22nd, 2021

Merry Christmas! May this find you all well and celebrating!

A little synopsis of my year. What marked 2021 most for me?

I celebrated the beginning of 2021 by getting my first vaccination shot against the Covid virus. A second shot followed in early February and lessened the paranoia I felt during 2020 ... *I no longer disinfected every doorknob before touching it.*

In March, I had some scans done and received the unwelcome news that my cancer (first diagnosed ten years ago) had made a return. While checking out different options for treatment, a friend told me about a doctor at the MD Anderson clinic in Houston who does surgery for stage-four colon cancer that often gives his patient years of remission. The surgery was extensive, and it took two months to recover; but the result is nothing short of “miraculous”. I am wonderfully healthy, working with full energy, exercising every day, and living in gratitude – with the prospect of some years of full health still ahead of me.

Retiring as President of Oblate School of Theology did nothing to reduce my workload. This was still a very busy, pressured year. I gave up administration for teaching, mentoring students, and giving talks and workshops. My work has changed, but not lightened. I teach each semester, work with a number of students on their doctoral theses and to give talks around the USA and Canada – though this year mainly on Zoom. I’ve been busy but, at age 74, few things are as rewarding as helping mentor students. One of the great things about being a priest, theologian, teacher, and spiritual writer is that you can be more effective in your 70s than you were in your 30s and 40s.

I’m still writing my weekly column, as well as chipping away on two books (neither of which will be finished before November or December of next year.)

Bottom-line - I still get up every morning looking forward to going to work. No small grace!

I had hoped to go back to Canada (Saskatchewan) for a break at Christmas, but the *Omicron* variant had me cancel those plans. Among other things, I had been looking forward to celebrating midnight mass in my home parish, St. Donatus Church (like Judah, hidden away in the hill country). They’re a special community. I’m at home most everywhere, but that is still where my roots are.

What’s to be said for 2021? As an old novelist once put it, *it has been the worst of times and the best of times!* Covid is still making itself felt, but Christmas 2021 finds me healthy, meeting life with full energy, and deeply grateful for everything, most especially for you all - family, community, friends, and colleagues.

At Christmas time, God gives us permission to be happy. A thing to remember.



