

# **A Reflection on Doubting, Questioning, and Healing**

*By Jimmy Dunn*

Good morning. I'm glad to be with you this morning and I look forward to sharing my thoughts with you on a subject that I began writing about last month, entitled "A Reflection on Doubting, Questioning, and Healing".

Father Greg asked me to present a reflection about my experience with Cancer. And not by design, that topic is quite appropriate on this Divine Mercy Sunday.

And with your indulgence, and on a personal note, I've been blessed with a generous amount of God's compassion during the healing process that I've experienced since my surgery four months ago.

But let me back up and share with you how this all started and how it has evolved to the present and my efforts to cope with the sometimes frustrating healing process.

It was last October when I noticed my shortness of breath. After making the bed, tying my shoe laces or any other task requiring some energy, I'd be huffin' and puffin'.

I made an appointment with Dr. Patrick Reilly, a pulmonologist from Mercy Hospital, who treated me for pneumonia six years ago, hoping that he could find an answer to these unpleasant occurrences.

He first ordered a chest x-ray, followed by a CAT scan then a pulmonary function test. None of which uncovered the cause of my discomfort.

The Doctor's next step was for me to have a PET scan at Magee Women's Hospital. Unfamiliar to me, I was told that this scanner was one of the best imaging devices in the area.

And I do remember the technician that conducted the scan saying, "I don't know what the Doctor is looking for, but we're sure to find it."

It was very similar to an MRI.

And anyone that's had an MRI knows how uncomfortable and confining that scan is.

That exam was completed on a Friday afternoon. At 8 o'clock the following Monday morning, Dr. Reilly called to inform me that the PET scan showed cancerous nodules in my left lung.

Those two words, "cancerous nodules" triggered an immediate response in my mind of shock, followed by denial.

“I don’t believe this. This can’t be true. There must be a mistake here somewhere”, I said to myself.

But no, the frightening news was accurate. I had lung cancer.

Wow, what a wakeup call that was.

Dr. Reilly decided to pursue the issue aggressively. Within a week, I had an appointment with a thoracic surgeon.

That’s when I met Dr. Omar Awais.

Who I mistakenly thought was one of the Indian Doctors on staff at Mercy.

When asked directly, he replied, “No, I’m not from India. I’m an Egyptian.” An Egyptian thoracic surgeon that I would later grow to admire and respect, not only for his caring ways, but more importantly for his skills in the operating room.

At that first appointment, Dr. Awais introduced himself, then went into a detailed explanation about the upcoming surgery. He ended the appointment by asking if I had any questions.

As Father pointed out I can be a modern day doubting Thomas. And being an irreverent person that I can be at times, I asked him bluntly, “do you know what you’re doing, and are you good at it?”

My daughter Helen Ann was with me as she has been every step of the way on this roller-coaster ride that I’ve been on since I was diagnosed with the cancer. She didn’t say anything about my pointed address to the doctor but I knew that she was thinking, “Careful Pap, your language might get the both of us excused from the doctor’s office.”

My sharp questions didn’t seem to offend him at all and his affirmative answers to my inquiries coupled with his calm demeanor convinced me that I was in good hands.

The actual surgery took place this past December 19<sup>th</sup> at Mercy Hospital, the very same hospital that I was born in 82 years ago.

Dr. Awais’ surgical team decided to use the VATS method, which has been in practice for over 20 years to extract the cancerous tumor from my left lung. VATS stands for video assisted thoroscopic surgery.

Three small incisions, about three inches long, were made in the rib area in order to insert a tiny video camera along with the instruments the surgeon used doing the one and a half hour procedure.

And, thank God, it was successful!

The initial phase of the healing process was three painful days in ICU where I was closely monitored and given enough ice chips to last me a lifetime!

That was followed by 32 days in the Rehab Unit of Mercy which the official title is Mercy Rehabilitation Institute, an area that covers most of the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> floors of the original part of the hospital and what is now known as UPMC Mercy, a hospital that has maintained its Catholic identity.

I received hours of beneficial therapy along with treatment of the Parkinson's disease and COPD that I've dealt with the last 5 1/2 years.

Call it Providence, fate, or "luck of the Irish", I ended up in the same unit I was in 18 months ago with a broken neck. It afforded me another chance to feel the touch of Mercy, not just a slogan, but genuine concern for their patients by the doctors, nurses and therapists who work there. They added another rung to the 'healing' process.

Upon my discharge and shortly after arriving home, I began a wrap around program offered by an in-home service company. It allowed for six visits by a nurse, a physical therapist, and an occupational therapist, all of whom were professional in their duties and caring in their attitudes.

But in spite of the positive developments that happened, nights of broken sleep had me questioning.

And much like Thomas in today's gospel reading, though not as dramatic, I, too, had doubts that were troublesome.

Before, prayers from the Sisters here at the Provincial Motherhouse along with those of my family and friends, I felt, carried me through the surgery.

But now the negative thoughts, such as when am I going to get better, or worse yet, will I have a recurrence of the cancer, simply magnified the nagging doubts.

The struggle between these emotions caused me to have a mental collision into an imaginary brick wall.

And out of that conflict came the challenge, "Why me, Lord, Why me?"

After some additional soul searching, I came to realize that the answers to all my questions, all those whys, pointed to one source, a loving and understanding God who worked through the caring and qualified professionals that I trusted.

They listened and responded to my needs.

Still another blessing, when you think about it.

And how that same healing and loving God works in our lives, but if and only when we let Him and trust in those who truly love us.