

## GLIMPSE

### The Depths

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Several times each summer, my brother and I go out sailing on his two-person boat which has one sail and several leaky wounds. We are hearty mates and as we are preparing for the lift off or embarkation, or push-away, somebody from the deck reminds, encourages, guilts us into wearing a damp, cold life jacket. Each of us is a very good swimmer. The sail's boom rides above our heads. The water is warm enough. But like little kids, we are forced to do what we're told. How ridiculous we must look; two grown tars accustomed to the waves and tosses of the briny lake appearing fearful and cushioned.

I am quite aware that the family and friends up on the deck are worried about our safety and our not getting hurt. I am aware also that their love for us is sponsoring their concern and while donning the jackets we are surrounded also by the warmth of that love. We are reminded also that it is the law of the state of Wisconsin. That carries less love and warmth. Risking is a risky business and fears are frightening and taking chances is chancy. We can all be concerned about our avoiding life's invitations, because of our fears of being hurt, experiencing pain and walking on egg shells. We can prize life so much that we can miss living.

I personally have a little pharmacy in my room; a lineup of tiny plastic bottles containing different-shaped pills, ordered by our community nurse to take each day. It is an aspect of my vow of Obedience you see, but there is that love-thing again. We are all aware of the cost of healthcare as well as the amount of advertising of healthcare products. We, as a nation, are living longer, but my fear is that we are not living deeper.

There seems to be a quality of person, call it depth, which is present in those who have been exposed or invited to receive pain, suffering and loss. I am not here advocating some kind of masochistic spirituality. St. Ignatius of Loyola suggested that sickness is as much a gift as health. We can ask what exactly that gift might be. Perhaps it is two-fold.

Little children, when experiencing the slightest bump, scratch or ouchy can scream and cry until some comfort is offered with a bandage for the little boobo and reassurance that all is going to be better soon. That child is receiving tenderness all right, but also the experience that pain is not usually terminal. Having a body

and a consciousness, the child learns little-by-little that pain is a part of the unavoidable human condition. Ah yes, we can avoid many pains and the various possibilities of pain.

The other gift offered through the hands of sickness and pain is the gift of our not being so terrified of suffering or sadness. This is precisely where the depth of person comes in. There is the old saying, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." The same can be said about pain. "Hurt me once and I'll never allow that to happen again!" This quality of life, this depth is the result of not avoiding life and its possibilities. Pain and suffering are possible, but there is more to life than avoidance. This pain-avoidance life-style results in sadness and sorrow and defensiveness to all that is new or inviting. I may have been sunburned once and did recover and so covered up when next I and the sun came out. If I stayed inside during the sunny days and went out only at night, well, sooner than later I would probably be afraid of the moon as well.

The depth of character resulting from sickness and suffering is an availability or receptivity to all that life can offer. There is the saying, "No pain, no gain." The real gain then is our openness to the "What's next" and "who's next" as well. Those who have sipped from the cup of bumps and scratches are more receptive to the invitations to accompany others as they sip, without snatching easy bandages with convenient statements of pain-relief. It is only a glimpse, be careful, watch your step!