

NOT AN EVENT

My wife and I recently had a conversation about parenting and grandparenting. None of our three adult children and our two little grandchildren live in the Carlisle area. It is a huge challenge to keep up with them and to have a meaningful relationship. My wife declared, "I want to be part of their lives, not an event in their lives."

That hope strikes me as deeply symbolic of the of times and the challenges we all face. As trying and difficult as it might be, we would like to be "part of the lives" of our loved ones, and not merely an occasion or special "event". But that is easier said than done. Truth be told, it is not easy to maintain a close relationship when we are separated by miles. We don't even have much of a relationship anymore with the neighbors who live on our street. For all our technology and our desire to be in relationship, we struggle.

I would also observe that for many, if not the majority, "church" has become an "event". I can only assume that God is also an event. And that prayer is an event. Decades ago, in simpler times this wasn't so. Multi-generational families tended to live on the same farms or in shared homes. They all went to church together. They observed the customs and rituals of the seasons and passed on to future generations patterns of speech, styles of parenting, and inherited systems of belief, just to name a few.

But in time our society has greatly diversified. Our young adults often look for employment and careers in other regions of the country. We seldom live in multigenerational homes. And so at Thanksgiving or Christmas, there is now a "mass migration" in our culture as we frantically attempt to be with family, traveling all over the country and sometimes beyond. We can talk or send photos on our cell phones to our loved ones or "text" them. We can "watch" them with a computer "skype" connection. And we can have hundreds of "friends" on Facebook, posting tokens of our life for all to see on our "wall". But somehow, all are poor substitutes for the real thing!

And what of our spiritual relationships? Is God an "event", not a "relationship"? Facebook, texting, and skype don't seem to be a good way to be in relationship with God. If in all honesty we recognize that this is so and if want to do something about it, how is that going to happen?

Well, it will certainly require two responses. First, we must recognize that we need to live in relationship with God and determine to change. Will Rogers was fond of saying, "You can't get to second base until you take your foot off first." And the first step is always the most challenging. Many times we take that step only in response to a significant problem- a health issue or even a death; an experience of alienation or a recognition of an addiction or dependency. We come to understand that we aren't in control and we seek God's grace and strength.

Second, we must establish a new pattern of living which makes it possible to be in relationship, and not just an "event". Again, easier said than done. Of course, as a clergyman I would plead for people of faith to get into good habits of prayer, Bible reading, and worship. This is a good time of year for

establishing such patterns and habits which can help establish a relationship.

But if you asked me for the simplest way to refocus and begin anew, I would suggest the first rule of St. Benedict, "Those who participate in this life with an attitude of THANKSGIVING will receive its full promise." Or to put it another way, "get high on gratitude" if you would like to really change your life. It is truly amazing to watch the transformation that takes place when we remember how blessed we are and not think of ourselves as the victims. Gratitude changes everything.

Is God a relationship in your life; or is God an event? Try getting high on gratitude.