

Thanks on the Threes

By Bill Lewellis

[598 words]

Near the southern end of the Northeast Extension of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, when New Jersey by way of the Walt Whitman Bridge is my destination, I listen to a Philadelphia radio station at 2, 12, 22, 32, 42 and 52 minutes after the hour. The station promotes this minute as “traffic on the twos.”

It helps me decide whether the Schuylkill Expressway or the Blue Route and I-95 North might be the better, or at least the less harrowing, way to my destination.

My occasional “traffic on the twos” practice has suggested another practice I’ve devised to help with another journey.

I try to get my head in gear to reflect for a few seconds or a minute at 9:00 a.m. and noon, and 3:00, 6:00 and 9:00 p.m. on some happening or relationship of the preceding three hours I might be grateful for. I call this practice “thanks on the threes.”

It helps. One unexpected way it has helped me is that even between those “threes,” when I’m inclined to complain about something, I search within that experience for something or someone I might be thankful for.

“Rejoice always,” St. Paul encourages us, “pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

“Expect nothing,” Alice Walker has written. “Live frugally on surprise.”

Surprise is the beginning of gratitude. It may also be the beginning of living with a clue. “Have you ever noticed how your eyes open a bit wider when you are surprised?” asks Brother David Steindl-Rast.

Be surprised, then obviously grateful, when you walk through a supermarket brimming with the gifts of God and the labor of people you’ll never know. Be surprised when your car starts tomorrow morning.

Technologically, as a “high-use, low-tech” person, I’m easily surprised. I’m surprised when my computer works, even though it works 99% of the time. I’m surprised when I’m able to connect so quickly with someone by email, post something on a blog, upload a

podcast, lay out a newspaper with a computer program and convert the page files to specifications required by a distant printer and distributor. Even though it's all part of my job, I'm surprised when the technology works.

When I sit at my computer to write a column or a sermon, I'm surprised when I see paragraphs begin to form on the screen, even though my head has been playing with the topic one way or another for days.

I'm surprised when, at the age of 69, I'm able to complete a 30-minute cardio workout on an elliptical at the Human Performance Center. Actually, I'm surprised that I have the will and am able to make the time to try.

Someday, the words will not come. I will not chance putting thoughts together for public scrutiny. Someday, my sight and my reflexes will not allow me to chance the drive to the bridge. Someday, my legs won't tolerate an elliptical workout.

Meanwhile, I will enjoy being surprised. I will continue to thank God on the threes, grateful that the whole of my life is greater than the sum of its parts.

“For the beauty and wonder of your creation, in earth ad sky and sea ... For our daily food and drink, our homes and families, and our friends ... For minds to think, and hearts to love, and hands to serve, For the brave and courageous, who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity ... For all valiant seekers after truth, liberty and justice ... We thank you, Lord. (From *A Litany of Thanksgiving* in *The Book of Common Prayer*)

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