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THE HIGH PLAINS PREACHER

Thorn-in-the-Flesh

by Fr. Schmitmeyer

In the course of our life, we get to know many different kinds of people. And some of those people turn out to be pains-in-the-neck. Let's be honest. We've all had to deal with people we consider pains-in-the-neck. And, if we cannot get away from such individuals, those pains-in-the-neck turn into thorns-in-the-side.

I bring this up because St. Paul once mentioned a thorn-in-the-flesh. In his Second Letter to the Corinthians, he writes: "Three times I begged the Lord about this (thorn in the flesh), that it might leave me."

Now, when I read this verse, I wonder *why only three times?* When I'm irked about something, I'll complain to God, not 3 times, but 300 times, sometimes more than that! Does this mean that St. Paul's thorn-in-the-flesh wasn't as serious as mine tend to be? I doubt it. It just means that Paul had a lot more fortitude than me...and a higher pain tolerance.

Most of the time, when I complain, God tells me—as he told St. Paul—to "buck up" and, eventually, with the help of God's grace, I get past the issue and move on.

But what about St. Paul and his "thorn in the flesh?" Ever wonder what it was?

There are many theories and no one knows for sure. Paul could be referring to opposition to his teaching or a personal problem or even a physical disability. Some verses in his writing, in fact, suggest that St. Paul had poor eye sight and, in the days before eye-glasses, contact lens or Lasik surgery, poor vision could well have been Paul's "thorn-in-the-flesh."

If so, he refers to this poor vision "thorn-in-the-flesh" in the same paragraph in which he spoke of his excellent vision for things not of this world. "Because of the abundance of revelations," he writes, "a thorn in the flesh was given to me...to keep me from being too elated."

Maybe you can relate. Ever experience a problem that resulted in unexpected grace? It does happen, now then and, when it does, it puts the pains in the neck, the thorns-in-the-side and the aches-in-the-back in perspective. After all, it's over and above the thorns that you discover the roses.

In every problem, look for the grace. "My grace is sufficient," said the Lord to St. Paul and today he conveys the same message to each of us. "My grace is sufficient," he says. "It won't let you down. My grace will see you through."

