

## **A reflection on the fourth week of Lent**

*A clean heart, create for me, O God. Ps. 51*

As human beings we connect and communicate through stories. Ancient myths tell us how human nature works today. The story of Achilles' heel is so well known that anatomists named that tendon after the mythical character, and we use it as a metaphor for a person's weak spot. When we gather at a family reunion we tell the escapades of past generations and pass them along to the next generation. At high school reunions the air is filled with stories, some true, some mythical, of our exploits as teens. It might be the tale of the basketball team that won the state championship or the tragedy of a classmate who died young in a car accident. At wakes and funerals we eulogize the deceased person--calling to mind how that person impacted our lives. Whether we cry in sorrow or weep with laughter, the emotions aroused by such narratives bind us to one another and give courage and comfort.

Health care workers love to share the crazy events that have taken place over the course of decades. They tell of eccentric leaders, super-charged personalities, strict supervisors, odd-ball situations and challenging patients they have encountered. They also tell of the miracles of healing they have witnessed--the ICU patient who no one expected to make it, the trauma victim who survived the gunshot wound to the head and many others whose recoveries astonished their caregivers.

Once, the director of the dietary department happened to be near the entrance of the hospital. At the moment, a frantic, young husband drove his vehicle up to the door honking loudly. In the back seat, his wife was calling for help. Indeed, she was delivering her first child, right there, right then. At that moment the young hospital director became a midwife and received that baby into the world. Today, as he tells that story, he laughs with humor at the incongruity of his own ineptness as he rose to the

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challenge. He also speaks with awe of the new life he ushered into the world there at the hospital front door.

For every Catholic health care organization there are inspiring histories of the founders, who with courage and faith in God, took on responsibilities that would have intimidated the mythical Achilles. We revere and honor the women and men whose courage gave us the ministries that are so vibrant today.

There is no time of the Christian year that stories are more important than now, in Lent. In the words of Sister Juliana Casey, to contemplate the Gospels, “is to re-enter the event and become present to the grace and power it manifests.” There is no more powerful story than the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through our rituals and traditions, through fasting and prayer and penitence, and doing good works, we become present to his grace and power. This is heavy-duty stuff and we have to get in shape to do it. We exercise. We strengthen ourselves. We look deep into our hearts to find our true selves. This year and every year, we are invited to enter and engage with the most powerful story of all—human salvation.

The music, by Margaret Rizza and Kevin Duncan, is from the album "Her Music for Piano," Kevin Mayhew Publishers.

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