



Grant me, O Lord, a sunny mind,
Thy windy will to bear!

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

The refreshing breezes of early autumn are slowly turning into strong winds. There is a different sound in the trees. The branches of the tall evergreens now make powerful sweeps in the increasingly gray sky. In a few days little costumed folk will be knocking at the door threatening “trick or treat.” And, I cannot help but remember all the other children in my long life who have excitedly prepared for this night.

Halloween is followed immediately by All Saints Day and All Souls Day which in recent years for us at Starcross have gently morphed into the Latino Days of the Dead — Dias de los Muertos. What I take from this rich practice is a strong feeling that life and death are

part of the same process. Soon every time I go into the chapel I will see an altar of pictures and memorials of people, now gone, who were and are special to us.

Against that background comes an out-of-the-blue inquiry from someone in their twenties asking if I think I will die the way I want to? My unspoken response was “ask me again in 20 years!” But actually she is simply part of a project to urge Medicare to more adequately support people dying at home. I don't argue with that.

In a couple of months I will turn 83. And, I find myself in a situation similar to friends with AIDS in years past. Every day they seemed to lose something new. With me it is usually something small. I have no trouble putting on my left sock but I can't put on my right sock by myself. I have to ask someone for the name of the author of a book I know very well. I invent elaborate systems to keep track of the increasing number of pills I take, and the systems often fail. Those of you near me in age know very well what I'm talking about — and the rest of you will.

In these closing days of beautiful October it is easy to, in Emily Dickinson's words, feel God's (or life's) “*windy will*” and pray or hope for the grace of “*a sunny mind*” with which to bear it all.

Some humor helps. I was quite shocked to find that on the increasing times that I have to use a wheelchair I become invisible. Or if someone does see me there is that strange look which I

believe means “I wonder if he's violent?” When it is necessary for me to be pushed across a busy intersection at night I put a bright red sock on my walking stick and wave it around. On one occasion it caught the attention of a homeless man who went out into the middle of the street to stop oblivious oncoming traffic. I was very thankful. That's one of the things that happens isn't it? We have to get used to asking for help and being thankful for it when it comes. It seems to me that is a big part of the grace of a sunny mind.

So in these days when, in the words of an old carol, “the year grows older” it is an appropriate time to reflect on that aging process in the lives of people close to us and in fact all people with whom we share this planet.

Brother Toby