

The Vintage Voice

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T.K.R. Spells Grace

The Rev. Holt Jenkins

Recently, I underwent a double T.K.R. (total knee replacement). I can only describe what happened as an experience of grace.

Sometime before retirement, I had begun a long, painful journey with arthritis. There were many ups and downs, and some temporary forms of relief. Finally, surgery was the only option available. Along the way, my orthopedist retired and his practice was taken over by his son. I had complete faith and confidence in this young man.

Many preparations followed my decision to have the surgery. I read all of the literature, attended the pre-op classes, and began the exercise regimen that would continue in post-op therapy. Mindful also of the Prayer Book, I reviewed my will, went to confession and received Holy Communion the morning before I entered the hospital. The surgery went well, and I remember being in good spirits in the recovery room. Of course, I was equipped with a morphine pump.

What followed next is best described as a "black hole." I had a reaction to the painkiller that was given to replace the morphine. I remember nothing for several days. I don't remember my family being there. I don't remember the nurses. My only sure memory is one of our Christ Church clergy shaking me and saying, "Wake up, I brought you Communion." When I became fully lucid and ready for recovery, I moved to a rehab center just a few blocks from home.

I was put on a pain management routine that worked: one pain pill a half-hour before going into therapy. Therapy took place in the gym three times a day for an hour at a time. Although wheelchairs were available, I walked to and from the gym. "You didn't come here to learn how to ride," I was told. The exercises were an intensified version of the ones I had begun before surgery. In addition, I had to re-learn how to take a shower, get in and out of a car, etc. My rector accompanied me to the first therapy session. I lay on the mat and he sat beside me for the hour. We talked, but what really mattered was that he was there. I now know something about the ministry of presence. Other clergy on our parish staff, neighboring priests, friends, and of course, my family, all spent time with me. I received Communion from one of our Lay Eucharistic Ministers.

I had a roommate who became a good friend. He was a retired naval officer, about my age, and an Episcopalian. He had had a hip replacement. We listened to the classical music station on my battery radio and watched the History Channel on TV. After five days, we both went home. My report card to the rehab center doctor said, "A+."

At home for three weeks, I was treated by a therapist who came to the house three days a week. Joseph is a kind, gentle man from Madras, India. He is a member of the Mar Thoma Church and so we had many interesting ecumenical discussions.

I have now progressed from a walker to a cane to walking unassisted. I continue to do the exercises every day. There is a rhythm and ritual to them, like the liturgy. They have become an add-on to the Daily Office.

The pain of arthritis is gone and I am developing complete mobility in my knees. The doctor's last words were, "Come back in a year."



The Rev. Holt Jenkins is a retired priest of the Diocese of Virginia. He was ordained in 1950 and served parishes in Maryland and Virginia. Since retiring, he has had a ministry of spiritual direction. He and his wife Mary Louise live in Alexandria near their three married children and seven grandchildren. Mary Louise and Holt attend Christ Church in Alexandria, where he sometimes helps with weekday services.



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445 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10016