

Reflections on Aging: Growing Toward the Light

The Gift of Humor

By Phyllis Bruce

As we continue our reflections of aging, we look this month at the Gift of Humor. These reflections are based on the book by Henri Nouwen, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*. Nouwen defines humor as “knowledge with a soft smile”. Humor takes things seriously, but not too much. Even in life’s darkest moments, a bit of humor gives a needed release. As a young woman, I had a friend who was older and became a mentor to me. After her husband passed away, she related that when she and her family were choosing a coffin, the funeral director pointed out a lovely coffin with an inner spring mattress. The idea struck them funny and they all started laughing. She said this was actually a healing relief during this time of grief.

I have seen this gentle humor in the beautiful smile of a woman whose husband has cared for her over 10 years since she had several strokes leaving her with limited mobility and aphasic in speaking. During one visit I said something about what a wonderful husband she had, and she looked at me with mischief in her eyes and said perfectly clearly, “I don’t believe a thing he says”!! We all broke out laughing. Her husband would tell her jokes and then tell her to stop laughing which made her laugh even harder. He never once complained about having to care for her, only saying, “It is a privilege”.

A woman who I visited following her second leg amputation, told me how thankful she was for her many blessings such as a caring daughter, memories of a wonderful marriage, a good mind and ability to still enjoy a variety of activities. She also had Multiple Sclerosis for 40 years and had been unable to stand for several years. She looked at me with a smile and said, “Now I really can say, I don’t have a leg to stand on”! I was surprised and amazed at her resilience and sense of humor at such a time.

These are just a few examples of people who model the gift of humor for us all as we age. These gifts of hope, humor, and vision need to be developed during our lives so as we age and face more chronic issues, losses, and transitions, these gifts become an art we have learned. Any real art deserves our devotion and practice through the years.

Prayer: Loving and Faithful God, thank you for the gift of humor. Help us to develop and practice this gift as we journey through life’s challenges. Amen.