

Husband's illness kept family focused on what's important

Dear Friends of Catholic Schools,

Later this month, my husband, Jim, and I will celebrate our 40 year wedding anniversary. Some of you know that Jim was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis when we were expecting our 5th child and we were both not yet 30 years old. Now, though his mind is as sharp as ever, he is considered a quadriplegic and uses a motorized wheel chair operated by head controls to navigate around the house. Jim has often said that this disease was a blessing because it forced him to reconsider how he lived his life.

Our family has been affected in various ways by this disease, but I would say that one positive affect has been that I think our children have learned how to handle adversity and circumstances that are beyond their control. As I reflect on our years together, I realize that Jim's disease helped us stay focused on the most important things in life. I sometimes wonder if we would have had the same commitment to these had we not had the daily reminder to trust in God's providence. When I see our own children raising their growing families, I am grateful that they are passing the important lessons to our grandchildren. When I see other young families whose children are in our schools, I so admire their intentional commitment to raising their children with faith and an understanding that with God's help, they can face any adversity. We live in a society that sends the message to parents that they are responsible for shielding their children from any hardship, and then we wonder why some children struggle with perseverance and anxiety.

The oft-used sayings like, "God doesn't give us what we can't handle," and "God has a plan, though sometimes we don't know what it is," became real for our children. They saw and continue to see the remarkable faith of their dad. This faith is the basis for his joy and sense of humor, which are noticed by all who encounter him. It is Jim who reminds us to see the goodness in our lives, to focus on what we have and can do rather than what we cannot, and to thank God for all of our blessings. I recall that when Jim was first diagnosed, his physician told him that "if you have to have something, this is what you would pick." Jim's response was, "I don't know, I think I'd pick the common cold!" So while I would not wish an incurable disease on anyone, I would wish that all young families could learn the valuable lessons that it has taught us.

Vaya con Dios!