

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at www.mlcchurch.com

How vulnerable are we? In recent years, I no longer enjoy flying. I think it mostly started in the aftermath of 9/11 with the long lines and the tedious, often times delayed security-check process. Predictably, my artificial hip manages to set off the screening alarm without fail.

Over here in the holding area, sir; we'll get someone to check you out real soon! Over time, I can tell you, it wears on you.

Still, better safe than sorry, as the saying goes. All of which prompts the question, *How vulnerable are we, anyway?*

The odds, apparently, are in our favor, if that helps at all. Our chances of dying in a plane crash are reportedly one in ten million. Still, when we're hurtling through the skies at great speeds, almost any sudden disruption sets off our antennae of vulnerability and fear.

In August, en route to New York City for the Memorial Service of a dear friend—only ten minutes into our flight—smoke was suddenly seeping into the cabin. Although it never escalated into an inescapably frightening situation (within twenty minutes, we were safely back on the ground), still, some scary, possible scenarios flash through your mind.

Vulnerability as a unifying awareness. If we tell the truth about ourselves, we're vulnerable creatures. None of us gets out of this life alive. Life, even for the most healthy and strong among us, is fleeting.

However, to sound a more encouraging note, this same vulnerability is the foundation of an enduring solidarity. As St. Jerome observed centuries ago, *Whatever one of us suffers any of us can suffer.*

Still, our solidarity is something we humans must choose. In our modern day of global terrorism, too often our shared vulnerability leads, not to mercy and solidarity, but to strategic exploitation of the very thing we all share.

In any event, our vulnerability has the potential to be a wake-up call to a shared awareness that can serve us all. It reminds us, in the promptings of Genesis 3 and Psalm 103, that *from dust we have come and to dust we shall return.*

Indeed, as the Psalm suggests, God's compassion is born of God's knowledge of just how vulnerable we are. But that can be a good thing; good, because it compels us to turn toward each other.

How will we live? Every day, the challenge before us is: how, indeed, will we live? Will we live with greater fear, or with greater compassion and solidarity? What will we choose?

One of the pervasive and increasingly-important truths of our time is that—every day—we need each other more. With the advances of our technological age and, along with it, the gradual *shrinking* of the earth, we are more—not less—interdependent.

Increasingly, and in more diverse ways, we need each other. In our *turning toward each other*, we must find ways of building bridges between our cultures, our religions, our views of the world and our ways of life. Awareness of our vulnerability teaches us that we have no choice.

Our *turning toward each other* offers tremendous possibilities for deepening the bonds of our shared existence. Increased awareness of our inter-dependence can enrich and deepen the process of our bridge building. It can be the springboard for becoming more informed about our neighbors around the globe.

The realization that *we're all in this boat together*, that what is good for all of us (as a collective) is good for any one of us (as an individual), can inspire new and transformed ways of seeing the world and understanding our life-purpose. Perhaps, this new awareness is a hint of the divine intent all along: that through our shared vulnerability, God has placed us in each other's care.