

Sweetness of a Rose Helps Ease Sting of Life's Thorny Moments

By REV. DONALD K. HUMMEL

"It's the most wonderful time of the year..."

Recently, I was struck to hear these lyrics drifting musically through my consciousness and I wondered why they were singing a song usually associated with the "holidays" in August.

While even I can appreciate the need to prepare for the "season" sufficiently in advance, the timing seemed to be preposterously inappropriate.

Upon further examination – I did an extensive investigation, of course! – I found that the "holiday" in question had nothing to do with late winter religious celebrations of any kind.

Rather, I observed a commercial for a mega-office supply store, with weary parents clicking their heels and dancing through the aisles, filling up shopping carts with school supplies, followed by nearly despondent children who obviously were preparing to return to the "salt mines" of the autumn school semester.

The scene brought home to me the reality that, in life, we need to learn to deal with whatever comes our way – good and bad, happy and sad, play and work, criticism and recognition – and that, if we are around long enough, we'll get an approximately equal share from both ends of the spectrum. What we strive for is (should be?) balance or harmony, or yin-yang, or however you choose to "package it."

How do we accept this reality and make it work to our advantage, as

well as those around us? One simple suggestion – certainly not the only or definitive one – that I have seen succeed time after time, with wide and diverse groups of young and old alike, in a fairly primitive, "high adventure" setting in the mountains of northeast New Mexico, where I've spent a good many summers, is called simply, "Thorns and Roses." Here's how it works:

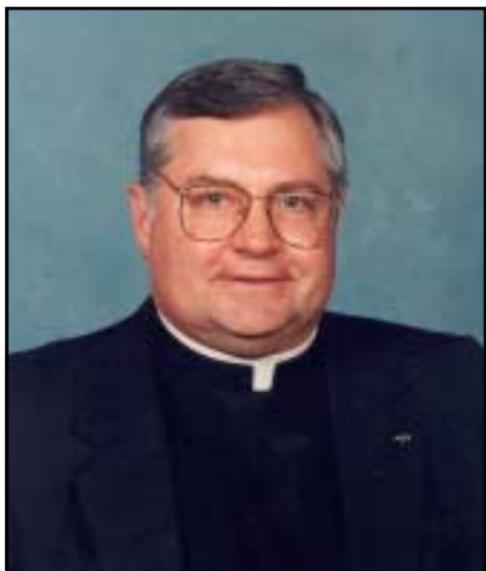
At the end of the day, as night is falling, the group gathers in a circle to "debrief" the day. Anyone may complain about anybody or anything on the trail that day – but first, something positive must be said about that same person (or thing) — then, and only then, can the criticism be voiced. Brilliant. Simple. Challenging. And...it really works!

We all like and need to be affirmed. None of us likes to be criticized. It's far easier to "hear" where I still have to grow, if I feel valued and you've told me that. Life gives us the "opportunities" to both grow and affirm. When these are in "balance," when we acknowledge that all of our lives are composed of both thorns and roses, then every day and any time of year, can be wonderful...full of the wonder and mystery of the great gift of life itself.

May you and those you hold dear know how blessed you are today – and every day.

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