

Not a good day for Jesus. As happens sometimes, family and friends who should know you best, understand you least. Jesus is so completely thrown by his home town's lack of faith he temporarily loses focus. St. Mark says he can do no mighty deed there.

Thank goodness there will be other days ... days he rejoices in the Holy Spirit because he sees God giving the gift of faith to the simple and child-like. Even days of elation.

Ah sweet elation. The word literally means you're so happy, proud, aloft, with a buzz, on a high ... you're totally carried away. Wedding days. Graduations. Times everything is breathtakingly beautiful and right. No wonder kids, inexperienced in what's involved in a full life, want elation non stop, and go from party to party looking for it.

Elation is a dear part of this life --- we all like it --- but it's just not the whole of it. Oddly, you can be too elated ... too effervescent, giddy, unreal. There are not many like this because, lucky us, there is a painful, annoying, completely effective remedy for too much elation in this life. St. Paul says: That I might not become too elated, because of the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, to keep me from being elated. Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me. But the Lord said: My grace is sufficient for you, my power shows to its best advantage in weak people.

Thorns are the remedy for too much elation. Thorns from God, or in St. Paul's case, thorns from Satan. They slow us down, keep our happiness from being perfect, make us have compassion and be more approachable to others. Thorns can be physical ailments, personality disorders, emotional pains, or limitations inner or outer. Depending on who you talk to, St. Paul's thorn might have been epilepsy, depression, a phobia, different sexual orientation, disorder in the parishes he founded, or the constant nit-picky criticisms of his detractors. They kept him small, humble, more patient with the troubles of others, more aware of his need for God.

But, enough speculation about St. Paul's thorns. What about yours? I asked around ... and got an earful! "I had a big drug problem not long ago; and I'm constantly tempted to do them again. That's my thorn." "My son died as an infant; every time I see his cousin, pretty close to the same age, I ache for my son and wonder what he'd be doing now." "I am painfully shy. I wish I weren't but I am, and it's always with me like a thorn." Allergies, worry about the health of my parents, low self-esteem, eating disorder, vile temper that humiliates me regularly, depression, arthritis, forgetfulness, a psychological wound from childhood, insecurity about my body and my appearance, fear someone won't like me, total fear of making a mistake, living in an English-speaking country and not being able to express myself well.

We all live with these thorns. You needn't be passive about them. St. Paul earnestly asked God to remove it. If you can remove a thorn, do it. But when the thorn isn't going away today or tomorrow, don't just sulk. With God's help, thorns can make you more humble and aware of your need for God. Not always so elated, more often patient,

approachable, sympathetic, ripening for heaven. People will see God shining through your weakness.

There is a most powerful precedent. Jesus is supremely attractive, but we feel most drawn to him not on his days of elation, but on that particular days when his crown was thorns, and thorns pierced his hands, feet and heart. He appears, there, so completely approachable, humbled, compassionate. God's power saving the world positively resplendently shines through his human weakness.