Opinion



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In the movie "Annie Hall," Woody Allen retells an old joke: a woman at a summer resort complains that the food is terrible. Her companion replies, "Yes, and the portions are so small." I remember that joke and I've told it. But a TV report on a remake of Annie Hall reminded me of the companion joke at the end: Life is full of pain and sorrow and loss. And it's too short.

I'm thinking about death because I've been with one of my brothers who has lymphoma, courtesy of Agent Orange in Vietnam. He talks about how he could die, about his will, about not wanting a memorial service, about suicide. I listen. This is his experience of being sick, not even knowing if he is dying or if a new treatment in the offing offers a cure.

The only words I had to offer are that dying is difficult. That's my conclusion from observing a lot of people dying. It isn't easy. I had a second grade teacher who had us all praying for the grace of a happy death. I have no idea what was in her head. I didn't understand then and I don't understand now what a happy death would constitute. Maybe dying in my sleep, but then again I don't want to sleep through this once-in-a-lifetime experience. Dying has its humorous side, but all in all, it's been a hard barrier to cross for my mother, two of my brothers, a couple of Catholic Workers guests I walked with, some of my own Loretto sisters.

One of my sisters, Theresa, who is failing, said recently about death, "Well, it's a problem. Scripture says 'Eye has not seen nor ear heard the wonders I have prepared for those who love me.' But my eye has not seen and my ear hasn't heard all the wonders God has offered here on earth."

Yes, indeed. What do you think?

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