



## **Fr. Matt's Musings**

**January 13, 2017**

### **Camden Reflections**

After a couple of years of ministry in Camden, NJ, I began to write down a few of my experiences of the city and of our community. I reread them this past week and would like to share one of them with you as a change of pace. I hope you find it useful and/or helpful.

### **Crutches and Canes**

Francis de Sales found the core of his spirituality in the eleventh chapter of Matthew's gospel: "Come to me all who are burdened and find life troublesome, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart." The humble, gentle Jesus spoke to Francis throughout his life, and he repeatedly writes about these two virtues. He says that humility marks our relationship with God, and gentleness is the hallmark of our relationships with one another. Frequently the two virtues come together. One of those areas of convergence is the need for each of us to accept our imperfections. Francis says, "Our perfection lies not in being perfect but in the attempt." In humility, Francis says, not only do we need to accept our limitations, we need to embrace them. To be human is by its nature to be imperfect and limited, and Francis wants us to accept and embrace our humanity. God loves us as we are, in our strengths and our weaknesses. In gentleness, we accept our imperfections and those of one another. In his section on patience, Francis writes that we need to be patient with all, but above all with ourselves.

When I was young, I had a problem with stuttering. I remember the frustration and embarrassment of not being able to say what I wanted. By the time I was in high school, I no longer stuttered although I still have moments when a word will not come out as I would like. It may have been that experience, but I am one who does not easily accept limitations. I find that many people try to hide their imperfections from others.

Some people are not able to hide their limitations. Some imperfections or limitations can be seen and heard. One such is visible in Camden. Since my arrival, I have seen a disproportionate number of canes, crutches and scooters. It may be a result of the poverty of the city: the violence, the diet or access to health care. It has become for me a symbol of the brokenness in the city. Each of us has moments when we limp through life. We need to lean on others for strength and help. I used to think that I was lucky to be able to hide some of my limitations and weaknesses. I believe that the crutches and the canes have helped me to remember the dependence each of us has on the mercy and love of God and the need to rely on the strength and help of one another.

Live Jesus!

*Fr. Matt*

frhillyard@olgcva.org

www.olgcva.org

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Our Lady of Good Counsel  
8601 Wolftap Road  
Vienna, VA 22182

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