

Little comforts, glimmers of hope

Joyce Rupp | Feb. 26, 2010

I came upon an old lean-to on one of my mountain hikes. A few pieces of wood had been nailed together and set up in a remote pasture. As I looked at the lean-to, I imaged cattle, horses, and sheep seeking shelter, finding comfort from the harsh storms that can come so quickly to the high places.

I could also see how we humans need our lean-tos in the storms of life which come upon us when our bodies are too weary to work, our spirits too hurt to struggle and our hearts too pained to care.



The journey of the human spirit has tiring searches, long stretches of

grief and letting go, dark-hearted things that steal the energy from us. At times we need lean-tos. Our lean-tos can be anyone or anything that brings us a sense of hope, a pause from the pain, a bit of strength to sustain us, a little vision for guidance, a touch of happiness..

We have a wonderful lean-to in God, whose heart continually welcomes and provides refuge for us. We often have people who stand by us and offer warmth, support, and refuge. Little comforts and glimmers of hope that we do not notice when we are strong become very significant for us when we are weak: a smile, a song, a sunrise, a bird's chirp, a phone call, or a letter. In all these we rest our woes and our weariness and draw strength for our recovery.

We all need lean-tos; we all need to be lean-tos for others. That's the blessing of human love and compassion. There are situations and moments in our lives when we are not strong. We feel weak, downtrodden and miserable. If we are fortunate, others will stand by us and walk with us. They will wait for us to grow, be patient with our pain, speak encouraging words and listen long hours to us. They will believe in us when our own belief is in shreds. They will love us when our own love has been mired in the dregs of self pity or confusion. They will be strength for us. They will watch patiently with us until our life begins again.

Lean-tos are not permanent havens; they are temporary but essential shelters when the storms rage around us or inside of us. Becoming too dependent on others is emotionally unhealthy. We trust others for comfort, support and vision when our spirit feels weak and visionless, but in the end, we have to do our part, accept our responsibility, and make our own choices and decisions. It is unfair for us to expect others to do this for us. They can cheer us on and cheer us up. They can go on believing in us when we cease to believe in ourselves. But they cannot do our growing for us.

I'm deeply grateful for the lean-tos I've had in my life. I recall a good friend who helped me through an extremely hurtful situation. My friend never tried to take away the many negative feelings this situation caused. He didn't criticize me, or rush me through the feelings, or urge me to hurry up and get over them. My friend just listened and listened. I trusted his honesty and integrity. He asked me good questions. He helped me gain greater clarity about my situation each time I spoke with him.

One day when I had complained bitterly about the situation for the thousandth time, it seemed, I voiced my concern to him that I was afraid I'd lose his friendship for all the complaining I'd done. I was afraid he would get tired of hearing my negativity. His response was wonderful. He asked me if I thought less of him when he was experiencing life's pain and when he needed a listening ear and heart. My answer was an obvious no. This response freed me to continue to lean. I did so for over a year until I knew that I was ready to leave the past behind me. I was much healthier emotionally because I was able to lean on a good friend when I really needed to do so.

From *May I Have This Dance? An Invitation to Faithful Prayer Throughout the Year* (Ave Maria Press).

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**Prayer action suggestion:**

Spend a few minutes recalling the events and happenings of this last week. Can you recall a person who was a lean-to for you, even for a very little time? Someone who comforted you or refreshed you? Recall this person in a prayer of thanksgiving. If you didn't tell them thanks at that moment, do so the next time you see them or talk with them.



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