

RM 8 - 24.2.23 Ageing Gracefully.

God's greatest gift to me was and is my life.

As we have seen, each of our human lives has its PIES – the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual components. So as not to insult the giver of this gift, I have been doing my best to look after all of its four dimensions. As a result, people assume I am some ten years younger than my 83 – and three-quarters - years.

Clearly, we need to save our souls, our relationship with God. However, I also believe we need to look after our bodies – gifts from God – so we can, across our PIES, serve God for as long as possible.

If you know me, you will not be surprised that I have structured this work around the PIES: The physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of our life. “Made to the image and likeness of God “(Gen 1,27), I use I - intellectual - because God certainly has an intellect though not a mind or brain. And rather than the Mind, Body Spirit, triad, I add emotional. Our emotions are our primary motivators in so much of our lives.

My aim is to die young – at an old age – with as many marbles in my head still working. That way I can serve God for as long as I am able.

Today, hoping to motivate or support your own endeavours, I will let you know how I have done this.

Living a long life is appealing even if the idea of getting old is not.

If you have not, as yet, worked on your art of saying young,, I would encourage you to start ASAP. Some damages to your Physical, Intellectual and even Emotional dimension of your life may be irreversible.

As Ingrid Bergman – my heroine in *Casablanca*, 1942 put it put it, “Getting old is like climbing a mountain; you get a little out of breath, but the view is much better.” And I add, “There are no more exams – apart from the final one after I die - and in London, a Freedom Pass.”

“Anyone can get old. All you have to do is live long enough.” Said Groucho Marx(1890-1977) he also made a fine and very true point. “I, not events, have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which it shall be. Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet. I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it.”

“Gracefully” is a double-barrelled word. As adverb, it means acting in an attractively elegant way, with dignity, panache. As adjective, it states that I accept- even embrace - the fact that all I have are gifts, graces from God., which I celebrate – as I take care of The PIES of my life.

The two meaning are linked. It is because I see all I have is a gift from God, I strive to look after all I have - and am. Not to do so would show disrespect for the donor and, as I approach my face to face meeting with God, that would not be a good idea.

Ash Wednesday remind me – as it does every year – that our life on earth is lent: loaned to us by God so we can develop ourselves and become *capax Dei* – capable of life with God in eternity.

I have avoided the egregious error of thinking that I am controlled by events. I am free enough to be responsible for my choices. To live a human life, is to make choices. To decide how you will be; how you choose to see the world. I have made mine. So here I am – as I am - for better and for worse.

Having a purpose – a creative reason - to get up in the morning and live an enjoyable day slows down the ageing process. Whenever people complain “how fast time seems to be passing”, I reply “If you were in prison or on a hospital bed – or with a toothache - time would feel; like passing very slowly. So, thank God we are swiftly adding years to our life.”

Frustrations accelerate the aging process so, to slow this down, over the past 40 years I have been using a SWOT Analysis. I consider my strategy’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.

Strengths and Weaknesses are internal to my operation —things over which I had some control: my energy, my time, allies-in-life and friends.

Opportunities and Threats are external—things that were going on outside my control.

When shaping my life, I set myself SMART goals where SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

1. Specific. Your goal should be clear and specific, otherwise you won't be able to focus your efforts or feel truly motivated to achieve it. When drafting your goal, try to answer the five "W" questions:

- **What** do I want to accomplish? I aim to help people apply Christ’s teachings to their everyday life.
- **Why** is this goal important? The Gospel can set folk free to live life to the full and give God glory.
- **Who** is involved? Radio Maria and me.
- **Where** is it located? In my heart and Radio Maria
- **Which** resources or limits are involved? My time, intelligence and memory.

2. Measurable. It's important to have measurable goals, so that you can track your progress and stay motivated. Assessing progress helps you to stay focused, meet your deadlines, and feel the excitement of getting closer to achieving your goal.

3. Achievable

Your goal also needs to be realistic and attainable to be successful. In other words, it should stretch your abilities but still remain possible. When you set an achievable goal, you may be

able to identify previously overlooked opportunities or resources that can bring you closer to it.

An achievable goal will usually answer questions such as:

- How can I accomplish this goal? By keeping on keeping on.
- How realistic is the goal? Past teachers and preachers have succeeded helping their contemporaries. So why not me, here and now?

4. Relevant

This step is about ensuring that your goal matters to you, and that it also aligns with other relevant goals. We all need support and assistance in achieving our goals, but it's important to retain control over them. So, make sure that your plans drive everyone forward, but that you're still responsible for achieving your own goal.

A relevant goal can answer "yes" to these questions:

- Does this seem worthwhile?
- Is this the right time?
- Does this match our other efforts/needs?
- Am I the right person to reach this goal?
- Is it applicable in the current socio-economic environment?

I answer "Yes" to all these questions. A worthwhile endeavour is not only fun but also stress - and thus age - reducing.

5. Time-bound

Every goal needs a target date, so that you have a deadline to focus on and something to work toward. This part of the SMART goal criteria helps to prevent everyday tasks from taking priority over your longer-term goals.

A time-bound goal will usually answer these questions:

- When? Now. Ten talks. Ten weeks.
- What can I do six months from now? Convert the talks into a book.
- What can I do six weeks from now? Work on improving the text
- What can I do today? Pray.
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As the years of my Journey to Eternity have grown, I have shaped my aim to "die young at an old age". How I have tackled this, you will see if you have the stamina to read this book.

When asked how I manage to look younger than my age would indicate, I say it is a mixture of diet, exercise, life-style, commitment and prayer - as well as, obviously - my DNA.; "Which earth has given, human hands have made".

A bright spot, however, is that what's also become clear in recent years is that genetics is only half of the discussion. Our lifestyles, as doctors are keen on telling us, are important in increasing or reducing our risk of various diseases. Research in the new field of epigenetics is finding that our lifestyle choices -- the foods we put in our bodies, the chemicals we are exposed to, how active we opt to be, even our social environments -- can actually alter our

health at the level of the gene. These choices can have big effects on our risk for disease, even if our genes seem to be working against us. So before throwing your hands up and saying, "What can I do? It's all up to my genes," improve your life-style.

Positive lifestyle choices we make - most notably, eating right, sleeping right and exercising - may have just as powerful an effect on our genetic makeup, as negative ones - such as smoking - certainly do have. Two recent studies illustrate this point. One found that eating well can "turn off" the genes that put one at higher risk for heart problems; the other showed that exercise can persuade stem cells to become bone and blood cells rather than fat cells. Each helps us see just how lifestyle variables work at the genetic level to modify our risk.

My choices have been underpinned by "The Serenity Prayer", written in 1932-33 by the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971).

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference."

Keep stretching - avoiding breaking - yourself across the PIES.

There is an increasing area of your life in which you can do sometimes what at other times are beyond your ability. Bio-rhythms - in my experience - are a fact of life. Accepting this - and working with the SWOT and SMART programs - lessened my frustrations- and thus slowed down my ageing.

When all are simultaneously at their peak, I can perform far more effectively than when all three are simultaneously at the lowest. In fact, I have heard, that in many Japanese companies - where bio-rhythms are taken seriously - anyone with the lowest simultaneous three is banned from coming to work.

- **Physical Cycle:** The physical cycle relates to coordination, physical energy, strength, and overall well-being. Twenty-three days in length, the cycle supports more awareness of times for optimum exertion and time for rest and recovery.
- **Emotional Cycle:** This 28-day cycle centres around creativity, awareness, and emotional sensitivity and can be helpful in managing depression or other mood disorders.
- **The Intellectual Cycle:** At a little more than a month-long, the 33-day intellectual cycle provides critical insights into memory, communication, and analytical functioning. Tracking this cycle may assist with work deadlines and goal-setting.
- **The Intuitive Cycle:** During this period, high points in the cycle can be a time of trusting one's gut, while in the low part of the cycle, it might be better to rely on one's intellect, or logical capabilities.

- **The Spiritual Cycle:** The longest cycle at 53 days, the spiritual cycle can point to times when spiritual awareness is heightened, with the potential for mystical breakthroughs.
- **The Aesthetic Cycle:** With insights into creativity, both as an artist and as one who appreciates the arts, the aesthetic cycle can help guide the creative process.

Accept that, as you age, you will have diminishing speed, stamina, and strength - as well as memory. Take notes. Use diary.

P The Physical.

I know it is important to look after all our PIES. As Brendan Behan - named by Irish Central as one of the greatest Irish writers of all time - put it, "I only take drink on two occasions – when I'm thirsty and when I'm not."

Julie Burchill (born 1959, beginning as a staff writer at the New Musical Express at the age of 17, she has since contributed to newspapers such as The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Times and The Guardian, reminded us that "It has been said that a pretty face is a passport. But it is not. It's a visa - and it runs out fast."

I am wary of sunburn yet stay in touch with the sun to reduce the risk of D vitamin deficiency.

I try to look after my appearance. Good for morale to shave, shower, keep back of hair short - and keep clothes clean.

I have lost two teeth - molars - which do not create problems with chewing so have not had them replaced.

I walk as much as I can. I remember - and teach - the mantra, "use it or lose it."

Scientific progress is accelerating improvements in medicine. There are now new molecules that enable mice to age slower, stay faster and healthier for longer. Soon – it seems – these will be available for human consumption. (Who knows at what price!)

Researchers are confident that soon there will be methods of slowing down brain aging and even, perhaps eliminate dementia. Our bodies are not like machines. They are capable of self-repair. Young bodies fight diseases easier.

I now try to keep tabs on my eyes – having an annual eye test (Yes, I have incipient cataracts coming on); my teeth – twice daily brushing, with a daily use of *TePe Brushes*. I enjoy my six-monthly check-ups and I know that my hearing is fading. In a loud, crowded restaurant, I find it harder to follow a conversation across a wide table.

I see my loss of hair, acquisition of wrinkles and saggy bits – on elbows and the rest – as ‘long-service’ medals for my years of life on this planet.

If you need a hip operation, make sure the surgeon does it from the front. Were he or she to go from the back, too much muscle gets damaged – with post op problems.

I do not waste the weakness/evil in my Heart. I use vanity and pride and desire to be able to help God for as long as possible to keep on keeping on with exercises .Given the fact that nine months ago I celebrated my 83rd birthday – and spent nine months in my mother’s womb - I do 85 press-ups on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays and 85 full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays. (A video of my early morning exercises will soon be available on my website fathervlad.com.)

I force myself to travel on foot - rather take short bus rides - and I always walk up and down Tube escalators and up to four flights of stairs in a hospital.

Now, aged 83, I admit I have balance problems. Good to hold on to solid things in the bathroom.

I also have flexibility difficulties. Not easy - when dressing - to pull up my left leg high enough to push it through my underpants.

If, as you age, you find you need help, do not get depressed. You have become the catalyst for the generosity of others; helping them express and develop their generosity.

I am grateful to God for treating my health so benignly. Apart from sciatica down both legs first the right in 1960 - which stayed around until I left Opus Dei in 1982 - and the left in 2018; and two kidney stones – both on the left – the first in 1987, the second in 1997, I have had good health. Even – it seems – I managed to avoid Covid (I write this 12.6.22!)

So far, I have not had to use what many people consider takes away dignity and grace. A colostomy bag. However, dear listener, if you or someone you know has to use one, remember that The Queen Mother (1900-2002) had one and – in public - was always graceful.

Arthritis. Thanks to my God-daughter Kate, who gave me a copper bracelet and Turmeric, Omega 3, and Glucosamine Sulphate which - on top of my daily 75mg aspirin - I take after breakfast, has staved off the worst effects. Now, my right hand – which at its worst was too painful for me to shake hands! - is fine and the left, just a wee bit swollen and weak.

Having researched its effects - and aware of the ethics of Big Pharma - I refuse to take statins.

I take the five-a-day seriously.

To keep my memory in shape - and reduce the risk of another kidney stone, I drink plenty of fluids; whenever possible, chilled water.

I embrace, not just unhappily accept, alterations to our culture: with its crash helmets for motorbike riders, seat-belts in cars, decimalisation and recently the increasing areas of 20mph speed limits. *C'est la vie*. Pointless to get nostalgic about the ‘good old days’

To help me walk upright, I keep my glasses on and look through not above them. I pick – I refuse to drag - my feet. Heels last longer!

I watch my weight. I have my own minimum of 'double 2-3' diet: two out of three days, just two out of three meals, cutting out lunch. No nibbles between meals.

Sleep enough. I now sleep at least eight hours a night.

I wear well-fitting shoes. When young, I was lucky enough to have my parents and nanny buy shoes that were wide enough never to cripple my feet.

My prostate is not perfect. At night and early mornings, the flow is a trickle. I try to look after it by eliminating red and processed meat, high-fat dairy and saturated fats. I enjoy an alcoholic drink before I go to bed. It numbs my twitchy-tickling sciatica toes so I can fall asleep without delay.

I. The Intellectual.

Our minds are – can be – hugely powerful. . The ‘placebo effect’ is sometimes as powerful as any chemical intervention. When US army surgeon Henry Beecher ran out of morphine, he told his patients that the saline drip he had inserted was morphine. They believed him and felt no pain during their operation. The power of the brain is, as the Americans would say – awesome

I tell myself “I am young” – and my body believes me.

Humour keeps you young. "The sound of laughter is the most civilised music in the world," stated Peter Ustinov.

"Many a true word is spoken in jest, " is a sound English proverb. "I don't operate rationally. I think just like a woman," joked James Dyson, inventor, after 5,126 rejected prototypes, of the Dyson Vacuum Cleaner - and then bladeless fan. Maybe, he was, seriously serious.

"What is two and two?" "Are we buying or selling?"

Thanks to the Boy Scout jamborees of my early years, etched into my memory are the words,
“What's the use of worrying
It never was worthwhile
So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag
And smile, smile, smile.”

Then there is the song Doris Day started singing in 1964,

Qué será, será
Whatever will be, will be
The future's not ours to see
Qué será, será

What will be, will be
Qué será, será.”

These two were added to the smorgasbord that is my philosophy of life.

After all, in Mt 6,33-4 we read that Jesus said, “do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day.” Anxiety is good. It helps the body fight threats. Worrying is good if – only if - it makes you find solutions to problems like exams and finances.

Remember the Frenchman, Michel de Montaigne – who, aged 59, died in 1592 - stated that “my life has been full of misfortunes – most of which never happened.”

To reduce my brain aging – and, I hope, the risk of dementia. I stay curious, I keep thinking – and writing – to stay mentally healthier for longer.

To stay as young as possible, I avoid ‘thinking old.’ My philosophy resonates with *Robert Louis Stevenson’s*, "don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant," and *Eleanor Roosevelt’s*, "the future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

After over 83 years on this planet, I remain an optimist. I am in fine company. Winston Churchill stated, “I am an optimist. It does not seem too much use being anything else.”

If the world is like a chessboard, of course there are black squares but I have decided to concentrate on the white ones. Given my current condition, I believe it has been a wise choice. Pessimism ages.

Thanks to my prayer-life and living the beatitudes, I have avoided depression which is caused not by a shortage of serotonin in the brain (that is a symptom rather than cause) but grief, often sub-conscious grief, caused by childhood – often sub-conscious - trauma, loss of nature’s beauty, loss of love, of status, control, finance, fitness, looks, values and hope.

Within our heart – our personality – there is a hole which only God can fill. No amount of materialism, hedonism, fame and glory can fill that void.

On February 2nd – the last day of Christmastide - I preached on The ‘Eight’ Beatitudes.

I said, “Last Sunday, the orders of service started each beatitude with “Happy”. I never use that. It smells of a pub’s “happy hour”.

Translators are traitors!

The Greek word is makarios, more than even Blessed. It’s more like “Oh the bliss of those who”

1. “Oh the bliss of those who are the poor in spirit, **people who recognise their own spiritual poverty, their need for God** for theirs is the Kingdom of **Heaven as they open their hearts through prayer to God.**
2. “Oh the bliss of those who are those who mourn, **people who repent and mourn for their sins** for they will be comforted **as they enjoy forgiveness.**

3. “Oh the bliss of those who are the meek, **who want to own nothing, inherit everything there in art galleries and nature.**
4. “Oh the bliss of those who are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness - **to be united with God** for they will be satisfied.
5. “Oh the bliss of those who are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. **Action-reaction. Give and gifts will be yours.**
6. “Oh the bliss of those who are the pure in heart, **free from evil in words, thoughts and deeds,** for they will see God.
7. “Oh the bliss of those who are the peacemakers, **the bringers of shalom, a joyful peace** for they will be called the children of God.
8. “Oh the bliss of those who are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, **as Jesus himself,** for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.
9. “Oh the bliss you have when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
Dare to be different. Easier as you get older.

There is nothing more ageing than becoming an office curmudgeon and who roll his or her eyes at any change.

Carpe dies - seize the days - not just *diem* or one day - for the optimal bio-rhythm days last a few dozen hours.

I accept – even try to embrace – change in our culture’s vocabulary. Groaning about “The good old days”, ages the brain. So rather than whinge, I accept the modern – for the moment, they might once again change - politically correct words.

Homosexual – Gay
 Dustbin Man – Sanitation Engineer
 Right wing protest – Riot
 Left wing riot – Protest
 Terrorist – Freedom fighter
 Global warming – Climate change
 Broken Home – Dysfunctional family
 Caretaker – Site engineer
 Fat – enormous
 Foreign food – Ethnic cuisine
 Jungle – Rain forest
 Husband or Wife- Partner
 Lying – Economical with the truth
 Wanted criminal – Person of interest
 Chairman – Chairperson / Chair
 Fireman – Firefighter
 Merry Christmas – Season’s Greetings
 Christmas - Winter Festival
 Lies – Alternative facts

Black sheep – Outcast
Blackmail - Extortion
Postman - Mail carrier
Manhole- Utility hole
Blacklist - Banned
Mexican - Hispanic
Man in the street – Average person
Man-made - Artificial
Manpower – Human resources
Mankind – Humanity
Christian name – Forename
Steward and stewardess - Flight attendant
Actress – Actor
Manageress - Manager
Plastic surgery – Cosmetic surgery

Cannot use the n word – which in the 40s was the colour of my sister’s school uniform.

To stay in step with reality, I know I have needed a constant *metanoia* – a repentance, a change of opinion - about so much.

When discussing the past, bear in mind that for an increasing number of folks, an increasing section of your life is for them history.

Life has taught me the accuracy of St Paul’s “*Omnia in bonum (OIB)*”: all will be well - when in love with God.” (Roman 8, 28)

Three examples:

1. Early one Sunday morning, driving northwards at Hendon, the car in front of me stalled as the lights turned green. I groaned. However, thank God.

As I approached the traffic light at the top of the hill and my lights were green, a car shot across from right to left. Had I not been stalled down below, it would have hit me – on my driving-seat side.

2. A friend was held up by heavy traffic and thus arrived at The Twin Towers AFTER the planes had crashed. Had he been in time, his time would almost certainly have come.
3. Something similar with another friend, this time in Australia. Due to a number of causes, he arrived late to get on the light plane that was due to take him to his up-country destination. Later that day, he learned that it had crashed.
4. A recent reminder of OIB.

On 20th June, 2022, unable to cross the Heston road due to passing cars, I just missed the 120 bus. Instant "shucks". Then aware of OIB, I quickly calmed.

A couple with their young boy walked up to the bus stop. After a short pause, the man thanked and praised me for the blue and yellow ribbons pinned to my lapel. "We are from Ukraine." He had been in London for a few years. His wife and child had arrived two days ago. We carried on a staccato conversation - their English was not too good - until the bus came. After we all shook hands, I stayed downstairs. They went up stairs

Had I not missed that bus, I would not have had that conversation - and then on the tube platform not had been able to answer the questions raised by an Irish couple, "How do we get to Paddington?"

So, whenever I am held up, I shrug and stay calm.

I am determined to eschew grumpiness; all too common - down the ages - with the aged. I quote a few I managed to dig up.

"We live in a decaying age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient. They frequently inhabit taverns and have no self-control." Words inscribed on a 6,000-year-old Egyptian tomb.

Then there is, "I see no hope for the future of our people if they are dependent on frivolous youth of today, for certainly all youth are reckless beyond words... When I was young, we were taught to be discreet and respectful of elders, but the present youth are exceedingly disrespectful and impatient of restraint." These are words ascribed to Hesiod, a Greek poet generally thought to have been active between 750 and 650 BCE, around the same time as Homer.

And, in the same vein, "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers." The quote is commonly attributed to Socrates (a Greek philosopher from Athens who is credited as the founder of Western philosophy and among the first moral philosophers of the ethical tradition of thought. He died 15 February 399 BCE.) but apparently there is no conclusive evidence that he actually said it.

The quote may have come from Plato's Republic Book 4, where Socrates is quoted saying the following regarding things that he thinks have been neglected: "I mean such things as these: when the young are to be silent before their elders; how they are to show respect to them by standing and making them sit; what honour is due to parents; what garments or shoes are to be worn; the mode of dressing the hair; deportment and manners in general. You would agree with me? Yes."

The Greek philosopher Plato (429?-347 BCE) studied under Socrates. Plato complained about the youth of the day, also. "What is happening to our young people? They disrespect their elders, they disobey their parents. They ignore the law. They riot in the streets inflamed with wild notions. Their morals are decaying. What is to become of them?"

Then, quite a few hundred years later, in 1274 CE, Peter the Hermit joined the chorus. "The young people of today think of nothing but themselves. They have no reverence for parents or old age. They are impatient of all restraint ... As for the girls, they are forward, immodest and unladylike in speech, behaviour and dress."

To keep the theme going closer to our age, in the 1790 book "Memoirs of the Blooms Grove Family", Reverend Enos Hitchcock wrote: "The free access which many young people have to romances, novels, and plays has poisoned the mind and corrupted the morals of many a promising youth; and prevented others from improving their minds in useful knowledge. Parents take care to feed their children with wholesome diet; and yet how unconcerned about the provision for the mind, whether they are furnished with salutary food, or with trash, chaff, or poison?"

And, on it goes. In 1904, psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall published "The Psychology of Adolescence", in which he warned that it was a dangerous time, particularly for young folk. "Never has youth been exposed to such dangers of both perversion and arrest as in our own land and day. Increasing urban life with its temptations, prematurities, sedentary occupations, and passive stimuli just when an active life is most needed, early emancipation and a lessening sense for both duty and discipline, the haste to know and do all befitting man's estate before its time, the mad rush for sudden wealth and the reckless fashions set by its gilded youth—all these lack some of the regulatives they still have in older lands with more conservative conditions."

With age, death becomes an increasingly common companion. Attendance at funerals of friends and all-in-life accelerates, until the few that remain – and are still mobile - will come to mine.

Of course, I did not carry guns or sold drugs, or killed people. I had home training. All too many of these young people do not. When young, we did not tattoo and pierce our bodies. We were taught respect, which a majority of younger people don't have. However, I prefer to concentrate on the positive rather than be dragged down by the negative.

In spite of St Augustine of Hippo's take on what he called Original Sin (Gen 3, 1-7), and maybe it's because I have not had to suffer in a Russian or Chinese Gulag – or Japanese POW – that I see humans as good though weak. More like a clean plastic bag than a rotten leather case. Neither can carry safely more than three bottles of wine.

E the Emotional

Thanks to my priesthood – with its weddings, baptisms, instructions, mentoring and care, I am socially, outstandingly connected - some 200 names on my list of those I invited to me 80th birthday celebrations. A few are real friends, many are allies-in-life and some are colleagues. All enrich my life and help me stay young at heart – and thus across the PIES of life.

To have friends, it is vital to be a friend – and that includes family: keeping in touch with them, being there for them.

Jn 15,15 "I call you friends" is for me the open door to The Kingdom of God. Living as a part of God's family keeps me young at heart. Living by giving keeps you young at heart and thus your body.

To avoid – or at least minimise - the risks of social isolation and loneliness, I encourage you to make friends – and keep them – so that when you don't need them, they are there for you. To sustain friends, you need the enlightened self-interest of commitment, time and effort.

I hate it when people state "Friends and family "- as though family were outside the parameter of friendship. I prefer, "friends, including your family". For me, long-range friends are the best there is - after health and hope - in life.

Regarding friendship – after health and hope the most precious gift in life - I subscribe to both Aristotle and Cicero. While Aristotle leaves room for the idea that relationships based on advantage alone or pleasure alone can give rise to friendships. He believes that such relationships have a smaller claim to be called friendships than those that are based partly or wholly on virtue. "Those who wish good things to their friends for the sake of the latter are friends most of all, because they do so because of their friends themselves, not coincidentally."

Friendships, that are based partly or wholly on virtue, are desirable not only because they are associated with a high degree of mutual benefit, but also because they are associated with companionship, dependability, and trust. More important still, to be in such a friendship and to seek out the good of one's friend is to exercise reason and virtue, which is the distinctive function of human beings, and which amounts to happiness.

Cicero admonishes us that even though we have something valuable to gain from true friendship - advice, companionship, support in difficult times - it isn't transactional. A real friend never keeps score since the reward of friendship is friendship itself.

An ally-in-life is something else: one that is associated with another as a helper: a person or group that provides assistance and support in an ongoing effort, activity, or struggle.

A colleague is anyone within a group of people that work together.

If you work at it, colleagues can become allies-in-life and a few may end up as friends; enriching your life - hugely. To gain friends – and keep them - work for a charity, join a club or mutual-interest cohort.

Friends as well as allies-in-life, colleagues and acquaintances die. A friend is someone who is an extension of yourself and thus his or her loss hurts, generating a void. Grief is the price of love. A cost worth paying.

To have a cohort of friends, be - and act - like a friend. Stay in to touch. I have a perpetual diary of birthdays.

I stay in touch with younger people: Godchildren, families I have married and whose children I have baptised, or prepared for their first holy communion as well as past pupils and parishioners. To stay young, take time with the young. It's worthwhile. (My pro bono,

excellent dentist, is a lovely woman whose parents I married, whom I baptised, whose wedding I celebrated and then baptised her children.)

Though I have always loved classical music, perhaps due to my early wartime years and my relationship with daddy and until, in 1982, I left Opus Dei, I considered emotions as a nuisance, like little children distracting a serious conversation among adults – the intellect, memory, imagination and will. Now I realise their value. Thank God.

S the Spiritual

Aware that I am never alone but alive with God - who is the radical source of my purpose in life and thus united to eternity - in which there is no movement – slows my ageing down.

Seeing death, my birth into divine eternity, as a friend gives my Heart buoyancy. To see what I mean by that word “Heart”, take a look at my book, "Life Squared" It can be purchased on my website fathervlad.com.

Alive in what Yeshua referred to as the Kingdom of God, though I know God is “Majesty”, my life is marinated in Hope and I see Father God as *a*, Daddy, the Son as *Yeshua* and the Holy Spirit as – the feminine – *Ruach*. A bit like HM Queen Elizabeth 2 is “Your Majesty and Mummy” to Prince Charles. This keeps me young at heart.

As I see the so called ‘original’ sin as evidence of stupidity – a lack of enlightenment. So, I keep in touch with The Word (*Sophia*, wisdom) that is Yeshua. Christ, as the Vatican 2 Council (SC,7) reminded us, is present at mass and thus in life, not only in the priest, the Sacrament and the Word, but in people, the congregation. As you will find in my “Life Squared”, watching people has taught me so much about God.

To age gracefully, always find a purpose, a role, in life. Many a time I have prayed Bartimeus’s “*Domine ut videam*: Lord, that I may see” what you want me to do, where I ought to be. (If you are interested what this has meant, take a look at my CV. You will find on my website.)

My grace before John Studzinski’s 65th birthday lunch sums up the salient points of my ethics. “Beloved God, I thank you for the most precious gifts you have given me: my existence, health, friends, roles in life and hope. May I never take these for granted - for gratitude is a life-enhancing virtue. I thank you for today and all those who have made it possible for me to be here. I thank you for the food and drink. As we enjoy it, may we come closer to each other and thus closer to you.

And may I never forget people less fortunate than me - who will be hungry today. I ask this through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen. Bon appetite.”

As I was walking out, I passed Gordon Brown (PM, 27 June 2007 – 11 May 2010) still sitting down. He grabbed me by my arm and said “Thank you so much for mentioning hope. Thank you.”

If you would like a fuller picture of my philosophy and theology, buy a copy of my “Life Squared – a handbook for life in an accelerating world”. It can be obtained on my website fathervlad.com

Life has taught me how psychosomatic accidents tend to occur when I am not at peace inside. As I have no children, the imagined future is less of a concern than it must be for parents and grandparents. However, though I do not subscribe to the perennial attack by the oldies on their youngsters, I am glad that I am old and will be spared the inevitable effects of global warming.

I will not have to witness the shortages of water in some areas and the migrations and political unrest created by swathes of the earth becoming uninhabitable. I will not have to witness - albeit, if the West is lucky, at a long distance - the effects of China vying with the United States for hegemony in what we call the Far East.

Then there is The Church. Will its leadership, will the political and economic unrest, bring cultures back from materialism, hedonism and denial of life after death bring countries to life at peaceful joy with God? I hope and pray that as societies progress, they will learn the art of maturing gracefully.

As I am a man of God, not a man of the church, the follies of ecclesial administrations are a pain but not lethal to my faith.

For me, the Church is a vehicle, at times in need of servicing and occasionally is serious repair.

I now more readily admit mistakes - such as snapping at those who, as they and I age, annoy me - for any number of reasons.

Always discover a fresh role in life. When one door closes - through redundancy or the decisions of your bosses - knock a hole in the wall and build a new one.

Your identity needs to be defined by more than your job. I have developed a wide portfolio of identity generators.

There is my priesthood, my writing, my friends and allies-in-life, my role as carer of a ninety-year-old.

When, recently, I was asked by a long-term friend “Are you lonely, Vlad?” I honestly replied “No. I am not a consummate extrovert. I need my time alone with God.”

My radical identity? I am a son of God.

Life has taught me a ninth beatitude. “Blessed are those who know how to laugh at themselves – for they will never cease to be amused.”

Role? Do what I can – given the parameters of possibility – to help heal the world or even better, enable the Kingdom of God to thrive.

We are what we ingest - across the PIES. So, take care with you reading and viewing.

Viktor Frankl, (1905-97), whose Logotherapy theories were heavily influenced by his personal experiences of suffering and loss in Nazi concentration camp, discovered what Jesus Christ taught us in his notion of The Kingdom of God: that human nature needs hope and is motivated by the search for a life purpose.

Viktor Frankl knew that Without a purpose, people die inside.

I know I always have the power to decide - to choose - my own unique response, my own unique attitude - to any provocation – to any life situation.

I have learnt how all too many foolish people I have met buy things that they don't really want; with money that they don't really have; to impress people whom they don't really like!

To reward you, dear reader for staying on this far, I will share “Vlad’s seven steps to joy in the Kingdom of God.”

1.Pray to see possibilities. 2.Select. 3.Commit. 4.Work. 5.Endure. 6.Learn as things change. 7.Choose anew.

Secret of happiness? Living by giving. Helping God make the world a better place, here and now, where I can.

All is a gift, a grace, a loan to be handed back when we leave Space-Time.

Prayer – staying consciously in touch with God, helps sustain hope and forgiveness. Both of these slow down aging across the PIES.

Holding a grudge can have a toxic effect on your body. It can raise blood pressure and increase risk of stroke or heart attack. It can impair the functioning of the immune system and increase stress hormones.

Forgiveness - when it is authentic and thus like God's for me - wishes well and offers help to the guilty.

Tattoos and piercing - for me a sign of uncultured barbarism - have, when I see them on women, an ethically beneficent effect. They anaesthetise any libido that might, having seen the female form at a distance, been lurking in my heart.

Maturity – relaxing in the way I am, with no need to prove anything – enhances the joy of living.

Use TAPS to maximise the gifts we have been given.

Thank God. Gratitude releases benign hormones in your body.

Asking – accepting the needs we have.

Praising – taking time to admire the beauty - natures and social/relational - around us.

Saying Sorry – seeing the past as a rehearsal for the present – and delighting in God’s merciful forgiveness.

Virtues craft character, shape our personality. Alive in the kingdom of God, I dare – indeed delight in being – different; with values and thus virtues the world without God does not have.

My role in life is to become the best version of myself – not in competition with anyone else but me. Striving to improve my PB – my personal best – keeps me challenged and alive in hope.

Kingdom of God, with values taught by Jesus Christ with his words and life-style, within which I am alive with God like the Prodigal father (Lk 15, 11-32) - and try to live the virtues that reflect my relationships with God therein.

Life is beguiling. Knowing, thanks to Jesus Christ, that I am beloved by God, “I call you friends” (Jn 15,15), I avoid self-destruct, self-damage activities. Because I can love - respect and appreciate – myself, I treat others as I treat myself (Lev 19, 18) lovingly. Love – expressed in words, feelings and creative actions – is a great cosmetic. More effective than the most expensive anti-wrinkle fillers.

Good to have a broad portfolio of interests and support agencies: people, hobbies, sports, charities and cohorts of similar minded people as well as – above all - a close and warm relationship with God, so that when some of your friends cease to walk this planet, there are enough to keep you afloat and joyful.

Next Friday I shall look at Motivations: why we tend to - and perhaps should - do things.