

RM – 1 The PIES of Life 6.1.23

A happy – I like to think providential - coincidence, you hear me on Radio Maria for the first time on the feast of The Epiphany.

As you probably know, the name Epiphany comes from the Greek *epiphaneia*, meaning “appearance” or “manifestation,” and refers to the manifestation of Jesus Christ to the world.

Christians believe that the 12 days of Christmas mark the amount of time it took after the birth of Jesus for the magi, or wise men, to travel to Bethlehem for the Epiphany when they recognized him as the son of God.

In Spanish speaking countries it is *Día de Los Reyes*,

In Italy it is *La Befana*, a witch who brings good children treats on the morning of the Epiphany.

In Poland it is *Dzień Trzech Króli* - the Feast of the Three Kings.

On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love sent to me  
Twelve drummers drumming.....12 doctrines in the Apostle’s Creed.  
Eleven pipers piping... faithful apostles  
Ten lords a-leaping..... ten commandments  
Nine ladies dancing .....nine fruits of the Holy Spirit  
Eight maids a-milking...the eight beatitudes  
Seven swans a-swimming...gifts of the Holy Spirit, The Sacraments  
Six geese a-laying... six days of creation  
Five golden rings .....the first 5 books of the Old or Original Testament, the Pentateuch  
Four calling birds..... Gospels. was colly birds. "colly" is old English slang for blackbirds.  
Three French hens.... Faith, hope and charity  
Two turtle doves ... two - Old and New - testaments  
a partridge in a pear tree ... Jesus Christ  
Though some scholars believe that the song is French in origin, the first printed appearance of the song was in the English children's book *Mirth With-out Mischief*, published in 1780.

To set the scene, I wanted to share with you how, after 85 years on this planet - 83 and a half breathing plus nine months in my mother’s womb – I see our life on this planet.

To help me, as my memory ain’t like it used to be, I like to use acronyms. One of my core acronyms is PIES. The Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and the Spiritual components of our human life, The PIES, inseparable in reality, can be viewed and evaluated individually. In my role as a spiritual guide and monitoring character development, I have found this acronym structure useful.

Instead of the traditional body, mind and spirit, I prefer the PIES. Why?

Because, on the one hand, we are made to the image and likeness of God (Gen1, 27) who, not having a mind, certainly has a magnificent intelligence as can be seen in the remarkably directed evolution of the universe these past 13.7 billion years.

And on the other, I include the emotional because it is our emotions that - typically - motivate most of our decisions and actions, which we then justify with our intellect.

## Physical

Exercises Website: [fathervlad.com](http://fathervlad.com)

Use vices fighting to generate virtues Pride v. sloth every morning in the bathroom, to keep my body in as good as shape as possible. 85 (83 & half, + nine months in my mother's womb, rounded off to next integer =85.

Always do one more.

People talk about the optimist's glass half full

I am blessed. My own glass is 95% full, just 5% empty. The froth – the beauty of youth - has been blown away. I keep on working with what I have and thank God I am here with you.

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 my years on this planet, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays I do 85 push ups and on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays I do 85 full squats. (A video of my early morning exercises you can find on my website [fathervlad.com](http://fathervlad.com).) Sunday is a day of rest.

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 and a half, 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, 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, Glucosamine Sulphate and to which I have added Magnesium, 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 eat wisely. I take the five-a-day seriously. Double 2-3. Two out of three days I eat just two out of three meals. Cutting out lunch.

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 and - of course - nibbles between meals.

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

Sleep enough. I now sleep at least eight hours a night. To reduce danger of dementia, coffee and enough sleep to enable the brain cells to be cleansed during sleep. Margaret Thatcher....

National Institute on Aging (NIA) research - findings appeared in *Nature Communications* on April 20, 2021 - showed that people in their 50s and 60s getting six hours of sleep or less were at greater risk of developing dementia later. Compared to those getting normal sleep (defined as 7 hours), people getting less rest each night were 30% more likely to be diagnosed with dementia.

Churchill, who often slept little at night, caught up on his hours by taking afternoon naps.

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. Alcohol before I go to bed, numbs my twitchy-tickling sciatica toes so I can fall asleep without delay.

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

## **Intellectual**

Funny how a few words can teach a young person important attitudes to life.

While still in Prague – probably in 1944 – I overheard my parents talking with friends about Bata – a Czech footwear company who in the mid-30s sent two reps to investigate export possibilities to Indonesia.

Each sent a telegram.

A' read "60 million pairs of feet without shoes. No possibilities".

B's: "60,000,000 pairs of feet without shoes. Huge possibilities."

I learned that reality is one thing. My responses – my take on it - are up to me. Positive. Optimistic,

People talk about the optimist's glass half full.

Aged 83 and a half- I am blessed. My own glass is 95% full, just 5% empty. The froth – the beauty of youth - has been blown away. I keep on working with what I have and thank God I am here with you.

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 I have celebrated my 83<sup>rd</sup> birthday – and spent nine months in my mother’s womb - I do 84 press-ups on Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays and 84 full-squats on Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays. (A video of my early morning exercises you can find on my website [fathervlad.com](http://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 reader, 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 eat wisely. 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 and - of course - 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. Alcohol before I go to bed, numbs my twitchy-tickling sciatica toes so I can fall asleep without delay.

## **Emotional**

Many years ago, I saw my emotions as a nuisance. Perhaps due to my relationship with my father – and the fact that my early years were lived in wartime Czechoslovakia - emotions seemed like noisy children, distracting the serious discussions between my intellect and will, my duty and responsibilities – no matter how I felt. Thanks to my ministry after I left Opus Dei in 1982, I have become more human. ( or so my friends admit)

Thanks to my priesthood – with its weddings, baptisms, instructions, mentoring and care, I am socially richly 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.

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 – ad 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.)

## **Spiritual**

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](http://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 65<sup>th</sup> 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](http://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.”

Pray to see possibilities. Select. Commit. Work. Endure. Learn as things change. 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. Love - respect and appreciate - self so can treat others as I treat myself (Lev 19, 18)

Good to have a broad portfolio of interests and support agencies: people, hobbies, sports, charities and cohorts of similar minded people. so that when a few cease to exist ,there are enough to keep you afloat and joyful.