

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Give Us This Day Our Daily Workout

It seems I have a little cholesterol problem. My “bad” cholesterol is good and my “good” cholesterol is bad, so my doctor is urging me to take up some form of vigorous exercise to change that. (I told her: “What? Kneeling and standing up and kneeling again every Sunday isn’t enough?”) She thinks a brisk walk every day will help—and right now, that will have to do. And with winter approaching, “brisk” is the operative word.

But evidently there are a lot of us in the clerical state who aren’t necessarily in the best state of health. Priests, especially, are not in very good shape. A news report once put it succinctly:

A national survey of more than 2,500 Christian religious leaders—conducted by the pastoral leadership research project “Pulpit and Pew” based at Duke Divinity School in North Carolina—said that 76 percent of Christian clergy were either overweight or obese, 15 percentage points higher than for the general U.S. population.

The story went on to quote Baltimore’s Archbishop Edwin O’Brien, then a remarkably fit 69-year-old, who said, “We should remind our priests to take the time for relaxation and physical exercise ... it’s very important for their health and their ministry.”

The article also cited a priest in San Antonio, Texas, Fr. David García, who runs, lifts weights and practices martial arts. (I wonder: Does he have a black belt to match his black clothes?) The priest said that he believes his body is a gift from God, and he should be a good steward.

Evidently, stewardship entails bench presses. Who knew? Fr. García deserves kudos for that, but I suspect most priests don’t have that kind of time, discipline or willpower. And let’s face it: temptations abound.

There are parish meetings where cake and cookies are the only items on the menu. There are dances and fundraisers with warm chafing dishes full of deliciously flavored fat. And—with the holidays fast approaching—there are thoughtful parishioners who send baskets laden with fruitcakes, chocolates and pies.

And eggnog. Let’s not forget eggnog.

A spokeswoman for the Archdiocese of Washington underscored that, noting that many priests live a sedentary lifestyle that has them on call 24/7. Another observer noted that younger clergy tend to be more fit; they’re more aware of the importance of exercise. The difference is generational.

All of which brings me back to me and my cholesterol.

These days I do a healthy amount of walking (or so it seems to me and my legs, anyway) and burn off my share of calories pacing the platform, waiting for the train to take me to where I have to go.. I’m trying to take the stairs more often. And the hike from Yellowstone Boulevard to Ascan Avenue and back a couple times a week can, indeed, work up an appetite.

Now, if I can just keep that appetite from leading me to that pint of Ben & Jerry’s Cinnamon Bun ice cream that’s waiting for me in the freezer ...



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