

The news media this week were filled with stories of Olympic athlete Bruce Jenner, now to be known as Caitlyn Jenner, after he revealed that he was living a lie, in his own words. Please permit me to offer a few thoughts that might be important as we try to make sense of this.

Someone this week told me, "God does not make mistakes." He was implying that however a person is born is the way he/she should be. Who can argue with this? There is a philosophical argument to support it. But we do believe that ever since Adam and Eve first disobeyed God, we live in fallen nature, which means that we live in an imperfect world. Birth defects are not God's intention; genetic problems such as sickle cell anemia, Downs Syndrome, and more are not His will. The eradication of human suffering is always a noble goal. Why else would the Lord give this command to His disciples, "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons"?

We must remember that God's intention is for a world without pain, suffering and sorrow. At the same time we must also remember that fallen nature originated in human choice- the choice to disobey rather than to follow God's will. This is where it gets complicated. The question that comes to mind is this: Are we doing something for God's will or for our own? Is it, "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," or is it, "Thy Kingdom come, my will be done"?

As Christians we are taught to refrain from judging others. I cannot say what is in Bruce or Caitlyn Jenner's heart. I will say that when I look at the photos of Caitlyn online, taken from the Vanity Fair article, I see a 65-year-old person trying to look like a 25-year-old woman. And I wonder....

Coincidentally, I saw an article in the Wall Street Journal yesterday that piqued my curiosity. It describes how scientists are working on head transplants (<http://www.wsj.com/articles/surgerys-far-frontier-head-transplants-1433525830?KEYWORDS=head+transplant>). In July 2013 a scientist in China transplanted a brown head onto a black mouse. Since then the same scientific team has done more than 1,000 such transplants, though the longest survival of any one mouse was one day after surgery. And I ask myself, are there no limits on what measures we take to improve life? Whenever we try to improve life by artificial means, we must also ask about the unintended consequences of our efforts. (Parishioner George Stamatis was referenced in this article.)

I have told you before the story of a teenage girl undergoing the sacrament of confession at our summer camp. She confessed to violating the 10th Commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," meaning that she was jealous of this girl's looks and that girl's grades and something else about another girl. I asked her to look at me, and then I told her that in all sincerity, I wished that I looked like Brad Pitt. She did not laugh, but I got her to smile. I explained that at some point in life we have to accept what God has given us and work with it while growing closer and closer to God.

My examples are taken from a broad spectrum. Surely being born with cystic fibrosis is different than being born with a gene that limits you to 5 feet 7 inches in height. I am struggling with the question of whether a person can be born with the wrong genitalia.

My thoughts about Bruce or Caitlyn Jenner are first, that we refrain from judging specific human beings. This is a basic teaching of our Lord. “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” One of the most beautiful prayers of our tradition says, “Lord, grant me to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother.”

My second thought: we need to consider at all times the need to follow God’s will as we strive to alleviate suffering. Humanity came to this point, to the point of fallen nature, when it abandoned God’s direction and went on its own path. St. John Chrysostom wrote that none of the evils and sorrows in life are inherently bad, but rather, “The only thing to be feared in life is sin.” Every step that we take and every move that we make must be done with this in mind. “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”