

The Challenge to continue to be Vulnerable: My first assignment as a parish priest was at St. Mary's Church in Auburn, NY. My pastor was Fr. Ed Zimmer. Every one of his friends called him "EZ". He was a wonderful man and priest. I continue to thank God for my time with him. One time I received a real dressing down from a neighboring priest. It was over my decision to prepared a couple for marriage that he had refused. He went up one side of me and down the other. I was shaken that this older pastor would talk to me this way. I went to Fr. Zimmer and shared the whole incident with him. After he had assured me that I had done nothing wrong, we had a conversation. I asked him how this priest could get so mean. He told me that this priest was an old friend of his. He told me that he was once a very kind and loving priest. But he said, over time he became more and more cynical because he made himself vulnerable and people had taken advantage. So this priest built a wall around himself to protect his feelings. The wall may have protected him from hurt, but it also kept him in his own prison. He chose not to be vulnerable, and thus he became a very unhappy priest. Fr. Zimmer said to me, if you want to be a good priest, you have to be vulnerable. You have to keep your heart open. There will be those who abuse you, those who will hurt you, those who will stomp on your feelings, but the only way you can remain a loving priest is to let your heart be open. I have found his advise to be so true. None of us wants to be hurt. But to love is to risk. Building a wall around ourselves to keep us from getting hurt only isolates us and doesn't allow us to really experience life. The challenge to be vulnerable is just that. Every time someone hurts us, we want to quit. But that is why it is a challenge. We have to reaffirm each time our desire to let our hearts be open and vulnerable. That is when we really feel what it is like to be truly human – to be truly loving. Look to Jesus. He always left his heart open. He was deserted, betrayed, misunderstood, rejected, and still he continued to love. He is our model. The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to live the vulnerable life. He gives us the strength to

continue, even when we want to give in and give up. So how do you want to live –behind a wall or open to the full experience of life? Let your heart be open. It will hurt sometimes, but experiencing the fullness of life is worth it.