

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Two years ago on January 29, a friend drove me into Boston to the Brigham and Women's Hospital where I was to have a laparoscopic sleeve gastrectomy for weight loss. I remember walking into the hospital and wondering what the rest of my life would be like after having this done. On the second anniversary of my surgery I want to share again the good news of what all this has meant for me.

First the physical - because that's the easiest part to share with you. Having lost 202 pounds of my original 384, my weight has plateaued at 182 pounds. My collar size has gone from 22 to 15.5 inches. My waist has gone from 62 to 34 inches. My nearly chronic back pain has virtually disappeared and I can once again distribute Communion to long lines of people on Sunday morning with no difficulty. Many people tell me they think I've grown taller - but that's partly an optical illusion generated by a thinner vertical version of my body - and the capacity to stand and walk "taller" than when I was carrying so much excess baggage with me everywhere I went. I spend 45-60 minutes on my treadmill at least 5 days a week and often more - and I enjoy it! I even miss it if I skip a day! In two weeks I'll be flying to Rome with a group from the parish. I'll only need to book one seat on the plane (I've booked two seats for years!) and I won't need to ask for a seat-belt extender. Most significant, however, is that two years ago I would never have considered such a trip because of all the walking it will entail.

Well, the previous paragraph was the part that's easy to share with you. More difficult to put into words is the emotional, psychological, spiritual transformation I've experienced. As I've said before, my weight loss has had a positive effect on every aspect of my existence and the interior change is even more telling than the observable physical change. I never doubted that carrying an extra 200 pounds on my frame was problematic in many ways but it's only the shedding of those pounds that has allowed me to understand how negatively I saw myself and how much that self-image affected my psychological well-being, my ministerial life, my spiritual life and my social life. I find myself relating to God, to prayer, to my work, to you and to myself in ways too many and too deeply personal and spiritual to put into words.

Has this all been difficult? I can honestly say it has not been difficult. The procedure initiated such an immediate and significant weight loss that I knew from the beginning that this was something I would never jeopardize or reverse and that I would do everything possible to maintain it. In the process my relationship to food and to eating has undergone a radical transformation. My eating habits are very different than they were two years ago (!) but I now have new habits that are very satisfying and I don't go through life "missing" the junk I used to consume or the bad eating habits that used to define my diet. As I've told many of you, "Nothing on the menu or on your plate is tastier or sweeter than the taste of life that's now mine."

I'm especially happy to have helped some others make the decision to have bariatric surgery. Sharing my story with others is just one more aspect of the joy in my life. (And please know that if I can help you in any way with this decision, I'd be very pleased to do so.)

Do I wish I had done this years ago? Indeed, I do! Still, I'm just grateful that I've done it at all and that with God's help and the support of so many like you, I have a new lease on life, a life I hope and pray will be longer and healthier because of what I did two years ago this week.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming

P.S. Some have asked me when I'll take the Christmas candles from the rectory windows. Well, I like them - and they're battery powered so I'll leave them there until the batteries fade. I will, however, remove them in time for Ash Wednesday, regardless of how they're still glowing at that time!