

Homily for the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The word ‘anxiety’ is defined as “apprehension caused by danger, misfortune, or error; uneasiness of mind respecting some uncertainty; a restless dread of some evil”. If you don’t like the word anxiety, how about nervousness, worry or fear? They’re all basically referring to the same reality that every single human being faces in various ways throughout life. Like for example, last night I got a call at 4am in the morning. Now, if you get a call in the dead of the night like that – what do you think it is? An emergency – something is wrong, or someone is dying. My response at first was definitely one of anxiety – worrying what it might be about. Turns out when I got to the phone it was just someone reading a passage from some catechism by the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Yes, at 4 o’clock in the morning! I guess they don’t just come to doors anymore!

Since that word ‘anxiety’ was mentioned by St. Paul five times in the four short verses we heard in today’s second reading, I decided to dig a little deeper. It turns out that the Greek root of the word ‘anxiety’ means the following: “drawn in opposite directions; divided into parts; to go to pieces because of being pulled apart”. Now, that says it – doesn’t it? Isn’t that what the experience of anxiety or worry or fear is so often like? We feel like we’re being pulled apart!

For example, we know that millions of people fly by planes each year without any incident; and yet, we worry that our plane is going down when turbulence hits. Or, we know we've gotten through very busy and stressful weeks just fine before; and yet, we dread Monday morning and the work week ahead. Or, in my case, I knew that it was just a troubled soul calling me in the middle of the night; and yet, it took me quite some time getting back to sleep as I thought about various scenarios unfolding later.

Applying this to our 2nd reading from 1st Corinthians today, it's easy to see what St. Paul is getting at when he writes about a relationship between a husband and wife pulling one away from their relationship with God. It doesn't have to, and it shouldn't, but it often does. God is to be our first priority, and then spouse and children. But, what often happens? Everyday life and needs and demands of family! And God can easily take a back seat. Even though we're the only ones who can control our schedules, sometimes we feel like a victim of busyness and all that has to get done. And people wonder why they feel like their coming unglued sometimes, because God is the daily glue that keeps us from going to pieces!

I'd like to share with you one of the greatest secrets I've learned when it comes to dealing with worry, anxiety, and fear. Which, by the way, all of these things come from negative thoughts that in our weakness we allow to trouble us, leaving us feeling doubtful, unsure, and even shaky.

This secret is revealed in two Scripture passages that I love. The first – 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all of your worries upon God because He cares for you.” The second – Philippians 4:6-7, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

In other words, how can we avoid worry and anxiety? By turning that which we’re fearing or worried about over to the Lord – totally, completely, no questions asked, 100 times a day if necessary! Cast all of your cares on God because He loves you perfectly and wants to help you! Yeah, but what do I do about my problem – it’s still there you know? True, but NO amount of worrying, which is just circular and illogical, is going to show you the best solution forward. Rather, talking to God in prayer, petition, and thanksgiving allows God to take from us our worry, give us His peace in place of it, and then clearly show us what His will is so that we can successfully navigate this problem.

Yes, I know this is tremendously easy to say. But, it really works. If we train ourselves to give our worries over to God faithfully again and again, then we will receive and grow in experiencing those things that He alone can give us – peace and wisdom. And, as we all know, we’re going to have plenty of opportunities in the weeks and years to come to practice! God bless you.