

May 10, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7
Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19
1 Peter 2:4-9
John 14:1-12

Jesus instructed His disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.
You *have* faith in God; have faith also in me.”

Have you ever wondered why Jesus encouraged His disciples not to be troubled? Undoubtedly there are many deep theological explanations and reasons as to why He might choose to instruct them in this manner; however, there is one common sense explanation that ought not to be overlooked because the same malady still exists today, and that is, we all have a tendency to worry.

Subsequently, there are times when we need someone to come along side to encourage us and let us know – don’t worry its all going to work out.

Worry is an interesting word. We use the word worry so often in our daily communication that it has become rather commonplace in our thoughts as well as - unfortunately in our internal state of being.

The noun form of the word worry refers to a condition or feeling of uneasiness or anxiety. What is more concerning is its verb form. The verb worry means to torment oneself with or suffer from disturbing thoughts. But even more frightening is this unabridged dictionary definition of worry, which explains worry as to “seize, especially by the throat, with the teeth and shake or mangle, as one animal does to another.”

Maybe now we know why St. Peter instructed the congregations in Asia Minor, “Be sober and vigilant. Your [adversary or] opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour” (1Peter 5:8).

Don't you just love it when the Bible makes sense like this example? I don't know about you but I have felt that kind of throat wrenching head shaking worry and I don't like it one bit. More or less we have all felt more worry than we care to admit or want to experience again. Sometimes it takes all we've got to call out to Jesus to help in time of need.

Jesus instructed the disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He did not want them or us to be torn apart so to speak when we experience anxiety, depression, persecution or for that matter, troubles of any sort.

Certainly God does not want you or me to be consumed with excessive worry. Yet, even though we are assured in Romans 8:28, “. . . that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose,” as human beings we have the inherent capacity to worry.

God, are you there? Are you sure that you will take care of me? God, please give me another sign that it will be ok. The fact remains, we simply worry too much about a lot of things. We struggle because we are broken images of God in the process of being restored.

In this morning's Gospel reading, Jesus knew that the disciples were about to experience a barrage of impending challenges and

changes, some of which might indeed cause their hearts to be troubled.

So here we join Jesus and the disciples, as Jesus was finishing up His Last Supper conversations and instructions. He told them that He was going to die, and after He died He would go and prepare a place for them.”

Can you imagine the worry Thomas must have experienced? “Lord, we do not know where you are going,” Lord, don’t leave us, we are lost without you.”

Unfortunately, when we worry it remains rather easy to lose our way and become lost. During these Covid19 times our world, our country, and for many their personal lives are in a constant state of unprecedented inconsistency. The end result is that many people feel and experience an over abundance of anxiety, depression, and uneasiness concerning the future; and all of that is what we call worry or a troubled heart.

Prolonged and excessive worry and depression can undoubtedly lead a person to feel as if he or she has been seized by the throat with teeth and shaken. Some people can get so beat up that they even begin to question their faith. Without help from the rest of the Body of Christ the victim can begin to doubt the surety of God’s Holy Word leaving them alone on the fringes where the devil, like a roaring lion can pick him/her off.

The disciples may have felt the same way sensing that change was imminent. The fact of the matter was that Jesus was making preparations to leave them. With all that they had gone through in the past few weeks and months, Jesus knew that His plan to return

to the Father would surely cause them no small amount of discomfort, hence there assurance, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Notably, few human beings relish the thought of change or new norms. Why, because we cannot control it, and change has a way of facilitating a sense of worry and self-doubt. What we once thought to be true and consistent, - it now being uncertain causes us to grasp for something else more sure.

Take the example of Thomas again. Thomas, who was no stranger to uncertainty quickly spoke up, “Master we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Sound familiar, Lord how am I going to cope with all the changes happening around me? I listen to the evening news and I’m thinking I’m doomed for sure. How will we ever survive?

Well first of all, and we will start with the natural first, choose which news you listen to. Some stations are all about telling you the worst-case scenario while other news services will give you a bigger picture both including both bad and good news.

Myself, I like to tune in to the Good News before I jump to conclusions about the all the bad news some person I don’t even know is trying to offer on the Internet or over the airwaves. Hence, where can you tune into the Good News, well its broadcast round the world on station BIBLE and it’s heard in every repentant heart that asks the Holy Spirit for help?

Jesus addressed Thomas’s trouble heart and worry with some of the most profound words ever spoken by anyone on earth. He said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the

Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.”

The Greek word for the word “way” used in this verse is *hodos*. It literally means path or road. Jesus is here saying I am the path or road that leads to heaven. If you want to know my Father you must to come to Him via me. I am the path to the Father.

So what happened next in the story illustrates the notion that we are very much prone to worry and then continue in search of assurance even when truth stands right in our midst. Philip piped up, “Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough for us.”

There we have it, just one more sign, one more answered prayer, Lord one more miracle and then I will believe. Lord, just one more convincing of whatever and then I will believe what you say to me.

Needless to say, I can only speak with certainty concerning myself, but I am sure this line of reasoning, or excuse most likely resonates with many of us. We really can act just like Philip, one more and it will be enough for me.

I believe Jesus answered Philip with all the compassion He could offer, “Have I been with you so long and yet you still do not know me?” In other words, Philip I have been with all of you for a long time, you have witnessed much, and yet you still do not believe that I care about you.

Philip, you heard me say it, but for some reason you do not yet understand that I am the way and the truth and the life. The Father and I are one, there is no other place you can go, there is no

higher person up the chain of command that you can petition, the buck stops here, if you have seen me, you have seen My Father. I *am* the way the truth and the life. All you need to do is just believe in me, but if you still struggle with trusting what I say, just believe because of the works you have seen.

The advice given to Philip pertains to all of us as well. In other words, we need to stop, look, and listen. Stop our racing thoughts for a moment, look at what God has already done for us, count our many blessings, and then truly listen because He wants us to trust Him for future blessings.

St. Peter wrote,

Beloved: Come to Him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . You are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may announce the praises’ of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”

So what is the blessed the apostle Peter is telling us here? He is telling us that we cannot be “lone rangers.” Why, because the devil devours them. He is saying that as one of the many living stones, our destiny and our peace is to be built or connected into a spiritual house, a safe haven, a place of refuge from the storms of life, wherein we are to be formed into a holy priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ Jesus.

In other words Peter likens the NT Church to the OT Temple, thus in Christ we become living stones that participate in the fullness of God's mercy.

So then, how do these biblical truths relate to any residual anxiety and/or worry we may feel?

If we look closely at the gospel reading for today and read between the lines it is interesting to note that both Thomas and Philip were very up front and transparent with their concerns.

Both were quick to readily admit their fears and worry. They didn't beat around the bush with Jesus and pretend to be holier than others. True they had questions, thoughts, and feelings, and so they openly shared them with Him. They didn't hide the fact they were struggling with Him leaving, or that they had questions concerning the Father.

The point here is that we need to be able to talk to Jesus about our concerns and admit it when we are struggling. Hiding our worries only makes them more powerful.

The Bible is filled with the stories of people who have encountered many situations similar to yours and mine. Their lives create a model or a paradigm for living; and lest we forget, we can also read about the lives of the saints and other faith heroes who have faithfully followed the Lord down through the ages of church history. They have much to teach us in regards to walking with God.

So in closing, let us please bear in mind the words of the OT prophet Jeremiah when he wrote, "Ah Lord God behold, you have

made the heaven and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm, and there is nothing too hard for you” (Jeremiah 32:7).

Thus we can trust the Psalmist when he reassures us, “See the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him and upon those who hope for his kindness, to deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine [or trials].

Therefore, as we prepare to spiritually render our lives as living sacrifices in offering the bread and wine let us joyfully receive the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament knowing that our sins are forgiven, our bodies will be healed, and our souls destined to be with Him and our loved ones forever in Heaven in the unity of the Blessed Trinity.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.