

Keeping Calm through the Storms of Life

In this week's second reading from Saint Paul to the Philippians, we hear the verse "have no anxiety at all." It might sound easier said than done, but consider the author, Saint Paul, went through just about everything you can imagine; being thrown in prison, shipwrecked, physically assaulted and beaten; persecuted; seeing parishioners in churches he was setting up wax and wane in their faith; and ultimately dying for the faith. Yet rather than run away from problems or try to ignore them, Saint Paul confronted them again and again. What then are we to do when the waters are turbulent?

Right now we're going through so much. The uncertainty of when our lives will return to normalcy. The uncertainty of a presidential election. Economic uncertainty. Not to mention the anxiety that comes with family members who may be hurting and struggling, or children dealing with the stress of a different kind of school year. Anxiety is all around us.

There are positive ways that we can deal with it though.

One is through prayer. At his most trying time, Jesus prays in the Garden, and we are told an angel comes to comfort Jesus; and while Jesus still faces the Passion, He does so strengthened with the resolve to suffer and ultimately triumphs over death. Jesus promised He would always be with us; we are reminded of that when we receive Holy Communion, and remember the words of Jesus that He would be with us always, even to the end of the age. Prayer might not make problems go away, but when we pray we can find calm, and the strength of God reminding us we are not alone.

Second, we have to remember Rome wasn't built in a day. When Saint Augustine of Canterbury was sent to England to spread the faith, it seemed impossible. There were scattered Christian communities but England at the time was largely pagan. Augustine and his companions set out, but on reaching France, they were frightened by stories of the dangerous waters of the English Channel and the fierce temperament of the Anglo-Saxon tribes. Leaving his companions there, Augustine hurried back to confer with the Pope. Gregory encouraged the worried missionary and sent him back on his way, after telling him, "He who would climb a lofty height must go by steps, not by leaps." Augustine returned to the other missionaries; they crossed over into England and there experienced great success in spreading the Gospel. It's great to dream big; but celebrate the small steps, and be patient. Whether it's trying to improve your spiritual life, trying to help someone return to the faith, working with a child, or whatever your goals may be, be patient and don't get down on yourselves or others if you take a step back, recognizing growth takes time.

Third, remember we are a community. Reach out to others. Hopefully you have people in your life you can turn to for advice; people who are good listeners, and people who will tell you not what you want to hear, but what you need to hear.

Fourth, you might consider a good counselor. God blesses us with people who have different gifts, and psychology is an important vocation. Finding someone you can open up to and trust can be a big first step towards finding peace.

Fifth, remember some things are out of your control. You can't control that free will of another person. Think of the prodigal son's father; how part of him must have wanted to go get his son right away, but he let him fall, and ultimately he wised up and returned home. You can't control other than one vote who is going to win; you can take precautions but still may end up with Covid. You can't control the future. But you can control the moment. Try to remain calm, and recognize that God is in control. Remember the apostles who are terrified in the storm; Jesus though calmly sleeps through it all and calms the waves.

Ultimately things do have a way of working out in the end. The journey can be a challenge, but God will always see us through, for we are not alone.

Recently when talking to a brother priest and friend about some of my frustrations and concerns with things in the world, he invited me to remember the Serenity Prayer. There are several versions, but I'll close with this one here. A good prayer to turn to when the storms of life seem to come at us hard.

God bless!

Fr. Paul

*God, give me grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
Courage to change the things
which should be changed,
and the Wisdom to distinguish
the one from the other.*

*Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right,
If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next.*

Amen.