

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time “Dealing with Anxiety”

Fr. Frank Schuster

Have you ever experienced anxiety that you kind of felt silly about afterwards? A good example can be at, say, the movie theater. When the music starts to get creepy, the house in the movie is dark, the character says, “Gee, what is that scary noise upstairs? I should go up there by myself, alone. Can I borrow your candlestick?” Next time, look around you in the movie theater and count how many people are hiding behind their popcorn buckets with fingers in their ears. They bought a ticket to see this movie and now they want to be somewhere else. I think it is an interesting human trait that we have, anxiety.

And then we have St. Paul in our second reading. He says to us, “Brothers and sisters, I should like you to be free of anxieties.” I should like you to be free of anxieties! Of course that is easy for St. Paul to say. He never had to deal with a creepy movie. What did St. Paul have to deal with? Well, being a Christian was a capital crime in his society, punishable by imprisonment or even worse. He lived in a society where there wasn’t health care like we have today or social nets. Living to see 40 was actually an accomplishment, as that was the average life expectancy. A common anxiety of his day was: how will I get food on the table tonight or how will I keep my family safe this week? As we all know, these kinds of anxieties, real anxieties exist in many parts of the world today. I mention this because it is good to keep our anxieties in perspective.

However, all of us have anxieties that are significantly greater than what a silly movie or scary book can provoke. There are people here today who are anxious about their jobs right now. There are people here today who are anxious about a family relationship right now. There are people here today who are anxious about their health right now or the health of a loved one. There are people here today who are anxious about the future right now. These are real anxieties and they weigh down on us. What are we to make of St. Paul’s words, “Brothers and sisters, I should like you to be free of anxieties”? St. Paul’s invitation here can even be found in our celebration of Mass at the doxology of the Lord’s Prayer, “Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.” What are we to make of this?

I think a hint can be found in our Gospel reading today. You see, the Gospel says, the people were astonished at Jesus’ teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. The English word “authority” in this passage from Mark is translated from the Greek word “exousia”. The word exousia has a wonderful ring to it. Let’s all say it together, Exousia! Exousia literally means, “out of one’s being”. To have authority in the biblical sense isn’t

about the titles we have. We can have the title rabbi, reverend, doctor or even mother and father. And although there are real rights, privileges and responsibilities attached to these honorific titles, a title isn't what gives somebody real authority. Biblically, authority comes from our being, from who we are, from the decisions we make and the example we set to others by the lives we lead.

There is another word that is similar to "exousia" that can be found in our creed. In the creed, we profess that Jesus is God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, and here it is, consubstantial with the Father. The phrase, "consubstantial", or "one in being with" as we used to say, is the English translation of another cool Greek word, "homoousios". Now, doesn't that word just roll off of the tongue, "homoousios"? Let's say it all together, "homoousios".

If Jesus' authority comes out of his being, "exousia", and Jesus is "consubstantial with the Father", "homoousios", no wonder the people were astonished at Jesus' teaching. They were listening to a man who had the authority of God. God, who century after century, covenant after covenant, offered grace and redemption to the people of Israel, now arrives in the fullness of time in Jesus Christ for the salvation of souls. God practices what God preaches and does so from his being. As Jesus reminds us in the Gospel of John, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." What does this mean for us today?

It means that, by our baptism, our nature has been united to Jesus' nature. If we live out of the divine nature given to us in our baptism, exousia of the one who is homoousios with the Father, there is nothing in this world that should cause us undue anxiety. Why? This is because we have faith that Jesus has redeemed us on the cross. We have faith that death itself cannot separate us from the love of Christ. Our very nature is from God. Whatever is causing me anxiety right now I can handle, because I have Jesus in my heart. Amen?

You know who really understood this was St. Theresa of Avila. I have shared this with you before, but it bears repeating. She gives good advice as to how to handle any anxiety in this world. She says, "Friends, let nothing disturb you, let nothing frighten you; all things pass, God never changes! Patient endurance attains everything; whoever has God wants for nothing; God alone suffices."

And so, my friends, what is the greatest anxiety we are facing right now in our lives? Does it surround a relationship, does it have something to do with work, or does it have something to do with our health? Can we take all our anxieties this week and place them at the feet of our Lord? As our nature is better united to Jesus' nature, the wisdom of St. Theresa of Avila is consoling, "Whoever has God wants for nothing; God alone suffices".