

ANXIETY

(There is more than the usual amount of anxiety in individuals and families right now. How do we continue to trust?)

So many of our human experiences have deep roots, even back into antiquity. Qoheleth, the author of the Old Testament Book, Ecclesiastes, speaks of “restless nights, exhausting work and anxiety.” In the last 24 months of the Great Recession, many, many people have experiences much the same.

Once again, so many people are trying to make do with so much less than they had not too long ago. This is true of individuals and families; it is true of municipalities and parishes too. Every family has either experienced, or been touched by, or lives under the cloud of unemployment. With the loss of work often goes the loss of other very valuable things—loss of revenue, loss sometimes of identity, loss of self-esteem—loss even of a sense of self-worth. There is less security; less connectedness. Many experience a powerlessness that is frightening and can seem downright overwhelming at times.

There are more fears, heightened anxieties, more isolation. Nerves get frayed; relationships grow shaky and are put at risk. Without always realizing it, we begin to withdraw; we go into “cocoon” mode. The psalmist for today knows these tendencies of the human heart and that is why the refrain is so simple: “If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart.” We must realize that God is speaking to us even in the midst of this Great Recession. When we withdraw and draw into greater isolation we harden ourselves to the blows that life throws at us sometimes. But that very hardness can harden us to God too.

What is God trying to say to us at this moment in our history? The first thing comes from Saint Paul. It is this “Your life is hidden in Christ.” The Lord truly does know all the particulars of your life and mine, knows all that is happening and not happening. The Lord knows our worries and our fears. The Lord knows what is happening all over the world. While we are struggling, the Lord is steadfast and true. The Lord remains reliable so that we will have someone on whom we can depend. We are asked to believe this and place our faith in Christ.

The second thing is this: While we are struggling to find work or to make ends meet, we must ask ourselves what else we must be doing? Jesus himself gives us counsel: “Work at acquiring that which will last into the Kingdom,” namely, the virtues. And at the same time, Paul reminds us that we are to “put to death in ourselves immorality, impurity, evil desires, lying and greed. The Lord knows that these things all have a toe-hold in our lives and we must be persistent in refusing to give into these very common, very destructive ways of thinking and acting precisely under these present-day circumstances.

We are bidden to avoid greed in all its forms, especially that greed which is idolatry. What is Our Lord talking about here? He’s talking about those things that we have allowed to become so important to us, so significant to us, that they begin to grow large in our lives and in our imaginations. The Lord bids us to practice the virtues. We are not to allow anything to become so important to us, so necessary to our well-being, that our relationship with Christ slips away or is put at risk. We seek security but it can

never be security at all costs. We seek more money in order to live but it can never be just more money.

We all need more money—your family certainly does, the parish certainly does. We even desire greater control of our lives but we can err by making these simple desires so important that they wreck our peace of mind or over-emphasize our natural acquisitiveness. We can make something which is not God into something so important that it becomes our substitute for God. We can lose perspective. We can lose our way. We can even lose our minds.

Your life is hidden in Christ. Believe that. Trust that. Live that. Despite your circumstances believe that. I must live that way as a person and as pastor of this parish even though the Recession has had a very negative impact on our parish families and on the parish life and resources itself. I too must put my trust in Christ that together we will weather this storm and regain our strong foundation again. I too must resist the temptation to harden my own heart to the Lord's voice that He will see us through. It is a time to pray for an increase in our faith and for a deepening of our trust. The Lord will provide. The Lord always has. Let us draw together and assist each other to live in this truth.