

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

On a sunny Sunday afternoon, two young church members were going door to door to invite people to visit their services. When they knocked on one door, it was immediately clear the woman who answered was not happy to see them.

She told them in no uncertain terms that she did not want to hear their message, and before they could say anything more, she slammed the door in their faces.

To her surprise, however, the door did not close; in fact, it bounced back open. She tried again, really putting her back into it, and slammed it again with the same result - the door bounced back open.

Convinced these rude young people were sticking their foot in her door, she reared back to give it a slam that would teach them a lesson. Just then, one of them said quietly: "Ma'am, before you do that again, you really need to move your cat."

Dear Friends,

The month of January is known as Mental Health Awareness Month. The whole world is stressful. We hear more negative things than positive things in life. We are anxious and worried. How many of us do not worry about anything?

Today's readings help us think about our anxiety and how we can handle things better in our faith and life.

In the first Reading people are anxious and worried about who will be the mediator between God and them because Moses was on his deathbed.

St. Paul tells us in our second reading, "Brothers and sisters, I should like you to be free of anxieties." That really made me laugh. I think the one thing that perhaps unites the entire country and world right now is, in fact, anxiety. These times are hard which make other opportunities for anxiety even harder, stuff like family struggles, perhaps other health issues that we or a loved one may be dealing with, our employment situation, stock market concerns, or the grief of losing a loved one, the list goes on and on. St. Paul is telling us this Sunday. "I should like you to be free of anxiety". You might think, "Well, easy enough for him to say! What did St. Paul ever have to deal with?" That is when we realize that we would do very well to listen to him ... because he was no stranger to tough times.

Following Christ or being a Christian in his time is a capital crime in his society, which could receive a life imprisonment or even death. He points out to be free from anxieties. He was further talking about celibate versus Marriage. Paul is not saying that married life is inferior or married couples are not holy. Paul's preference comes from his desire that we devote all our time and energy to prayer and service to others. He sees that it would be easier in celibate life, but we all got the same vocation through our Baptism.

I think to support Paul's writings, a hint can be found in our Gospel reading today. Jesus cures a man with an unclean spirit. This unclean spirit convinced this man to believe God had it out for him and was even going to destroy him. This unclean spirit disturbed this man's mind to the point of physical convulsions and loud cries. It was of course a demon causing him to do all of this; however, in my mind, this guy could also be a perfect metaphor for someone with a sincere anxiety disorder to say the least. My friends, anxiety can feel like an unclean spirit inside of us that convinces us that God doesn't care; or worse, that God somehow has it out for us.

Jesus had the authority to cure a person with unclean spirits. People were amazed because they were listening to a man who has the very authority of God, and healed the man with the same authority. Our readings suggest that the secret about how to be liberated from the unclean spirit of anxiety is to surrender ourselves to the authority of God.

All the spiritual masters in our history would agree that surrendering to God's authority over us is the only path there is to peace in this world and spiritual freedom. St. Theresa of Avila gives good advice as to how to handle any anxiety this world can throw at us. 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, ask yourself, what is the greatest anxiety that you are facing right now in your life? What is it? Does it have to do with a relationship, does it have something to do with work, does it have something to do with your health, or does it have to do with fear about the future or what's going on in our world right now? Now, can we take whatever worries us the most and just place it at the foot of the cross? My friends, have you ever considered that the cross is God surrendering himself to you! Jesus completely surrenders himself to you. That is how much God loves you.

So, what do we do this week?

1. Spend time in silent adoration to surrender and trust Jesus.
2. Read the scripture especially psalms.