

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
October 4, 2020

“Brothers and Sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” (Philippians 4:6)

These words, quoted above, offer us an insight into the spirituality of Saint Paul. We should consider his words carefully as they were written while he resided in a Roman prison. While not diminishing the reality of human anxiety which plagues all of us, Saint Paul reminds his congregation that anxiety, along with suffering and death, have been conquered by the saving power of Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection. It is the cross of Christ which provides us with both freedom and hope in the darkest moments of our lives.

To begin to understand why Saint Paul has this profound hope, we must first reflect upon anxiety as it pertains to our human condition. The first point I need to make is: Anxiety is not something anyone should feel ashamed or embarrassed for experiencing. All people struggle with anxiety in some form. Throughout the ages, men have tried to grasp the meaning of anxiety. Its cold unseen grasp can paralyze both the rich and poor; powerful and weak. Kings and commoners have shuttered in its presence. Philosophers have proposed reasons. Psychiatrists have prescribed medications. Yet, through all of our combined efforts, we have yet to truly ease the sufferings of those who are plagued with anxiety.

Saint Paul lays the foundation for our Catholic understanding of anxiety. It must be seen through the life and death of Jesus. When God chose to reveal Himself through the Incarnation of His Son, He expressly desired that Jesus become a man like us in all things. This must include both fear and anxiety for these are felt by all. Did Jesus contend with these? Yes, we can read about this intense moment of His life which so profoundly affected Him that both sweat and blood issued from His Sacred Body in the Garden as He prayed for strength to face His Passion. In that moment we can say that anxiety is catholic (universal) for even our Lord had to cope with it.

However, anxiety is conquered at that moment by Jesus’ willingness to accept His Passion. We can now say it has taken a *christological* meaning. By undergoing anxiety, Jesus has revealed to us another dimension of the Love the Trinity has for each of us. God has taken upon Himself all things human, including anxiety. This provides us with the one weapon to battle fear and anxiety - HOPE. As Pope Benedict XVI would express: “It is a hope, not based upon the laws of nature, evolution, or some random events, but a hope based upon the will and love of a Person.” It is the Person of Jesus who has the last word. We are not slaves destined to struggle in these dark times. We are free because He has freed us by going through those dark times. He is the light in those dark times. Fear and anxiety cannot control us; for they have been conquered by God. He is our Hope and our Shield.