

Third Sunday of Ordinary Time

We've been reflecting on the experience of worry. Although we all wish we had less worry in our lives it remains and it's easy to believe that worry is just an unavoidable part of life, that for parents, the unemployed, the self-employed, the sick and those who care for the sick as well as for so many other people, worry is just to be expected.

Indeed, there are many people who have much to be concerned about, but concern and worry: those are two different things. Worry leads us to believe that some problems are simply insurmountable or hopeless, that some people are in completely helpless situations and that even God may have limits when compared to the very real challenges presented in this world. Worry is not part of God's plan for us; it never leads to love or to joy, but consumes our thoughts, keeps us up at night, makes us irritable and can even bring on illness. In extreme cases, worry can lead down some dark and dangerous paths. So, we work to reduce or even eliminate worry when we can.

Concern, on the other hand, is based on hope; it prompts for action to ensure that the cause for concern is avoided. Concern is centred on the idea that something can always be done, especially with God's help. Indeed, there are many things that ought to cause concern and it can be a great motivator for action and change. Worry and concern are two different things.

Clinical anxiety is also not the same as worry. While worry may come with anxieties, it generally remains in the mind, filling the space there. Clinical anxiety often comes with a physical component, it can be paralyzing and may require some attention from someone trained in working through anxiety.

The assumption is not that worry is unavoidable, but that it can be overcome. Cause for concern may truly be unavoidable, but worry is not and it's not wishful thinking to imagine life without worry, without sleepless nights or minds full of negative answers to the question, "what if...". Speaking from my own perspective, life would, indeed, be much better without worry.

So, we come to the question about what to do when we catch ourselves worrying and we then wonder how worry might be driven out. We can find some guidance in the Gospel selected for this weekend. This moment in the life of Jesus comes right after his forty days in the desert. First, he's baptized by John, then Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness and then we come to this part of the Gospel, the arrest of John of The Baptist. On hearing the news of John's imprisonment, Jesus leaves his hometown and begins his ministry from Capernaum.

He leaves to proclaim a new kingdom, and he does so from the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, the first part of the nation of Israel to be lost when overtaken by foreign powers. This is why that land is referred to as the land of darkness. It was first to be conquered, the first to turn away from the Jewish faith, the part of the Jewish people furthest from the presence of God found in the temple in Jerusalem. Worry can at times make it feel as though we live in a land of darkness far from God. It's from this place where Jesus begins talking about the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of light and joy, and the first word he uses in this proclamation is the word 'repent'. This word, 'repent', is a word we hear often in the New Testament. Indeed, it's a call for all to turn away from sin and towards the love of God. However, this word, 'repent', is also a call to change.

It's a call for change in the mind. This is probably the hardest part. Concerns are going to rise up throughout life. For those in the habit of meeting concern with worry and the hopelessness that comes with it, it will seem unnatural to let go. But this is what Christians do. When concerns arise, we meet them with hope; we know something can be done and we act. So many of our parish service groups would fall to pieces if they lost hope and began to believe that some problems in the world simply have no solution. When concerns arise, we think of the great things God has already done for us, how he has led us here and opens the Kingdom for us and then we trust that he will continue guiding us as he has.

When Jesus calls us to 'repent' he also calls for a change in the heart. The Gospel this weekend also recounts for us the call of the first disciples. We hear about how Peter, Andrew, James and John left their jobs and families to follow Jesus. Oh, I'm sure that they still provided for their families; Jesus wouldn't want the families of his followers to face destitution; so maybe those first disciples had dependable family members they could count on or a well-padded rainy day fund. Undoubtedly their career change would come with many concerns. But these men don't seem to allow their concerns to develop into worries. There's clearly a change in the hearts of these men. They leave all they have behind and trust in Jesus; for many, the change would seem irrational because it's a change not only of the mind but of their hearts.

When Jesus calls us to 'repent' he also calls for a change in attitude. Much of our worrying really focuses on ourselves. When we worry, we wonder, "What will I do if this happens?", or, "How will I cope if that happens?" Worry focuses on the self. Last week, we took a brief look at the question, "Would God ever allow any of his beloved people to face some challenge that is beyond them?" I believe that he does so all the time. When I consider the challenges parents or

young adults face today or the challenges our refugee family has faced, I think that God does allow people to face incredibly difficult challenges. But he's always with his cherished people and mysteriously gives them what is needed to endure those challenges. While we all have many concerns in our lives, God has brought us here today safely to his presence; he's obviously with us and cares for us. There is no reason to believe he will cease doing so through the challenges of tomorrow.

When Jesus speaks about the, 'kingdom of heaven', or the, 'kingdom of God', he's talking about the reality of God, God's will, God's plan, unfolding now. God's plan for us and the kind of life he wants for us is an existence where fear and worry has no place, where our deepest longings are met and our fullest potential achieved. Repentance, turning towards this future God has prepared for us, is inconsistent with worry. You can't repent and be all excited for an eternal future of joy, while also allowing worry to consume.

The big lie of worry that we work to refute is that worry is inevitable, that we have no other choice. But, indeed, we do have a choice. When concerns arise, we don't fall into the trap of hopelessness that worry urges us to, but we cling to hope, we know God has been with us and that he will continue to be with us to guide us to that Kingdom he has promised.

God of all, your people face a great many concerns and carry a great many worries. Through your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of peace, open our eyes to see your presence, to recognize how you have guided us safely to today and to trust that you will never abandon us. Through this may our lives be filled with peace. This prayer we offer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.