

## 24 May 2020, The 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter: I Peter 5:7

*Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares for you.*

We may not think of anxiety as a spiritual temptation, yet that is the traditional Christian view. Anxiety is being uneasy, apprehensive or worried about what may happen. There are, of course, degrees of anxiety: worry about one's appearance is slight compared to receiving a life-changing diagnosis. Anxiety can stunt our spiritual growth in Christ. This saying in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is hardly isolated. Paul writes about anxiety in several Epistles and Jesus speaks of it more than once in the Gospels.

*Cast all your anxieties on (Christ)...* Peter wrote to a young Christian congregation facing persecution. We do not face the same threat, yet Peter's admonition is invaluable. First, he advises ...*humble yourselves before the mighty hand of God...* then writes: *Discipline yourselves, keep alert.* We cannot control whether anxiety comes calling, but we can learn to surrender anxiety. Peter does not write, "Don't be anxious", but *cast your anxiety on (Christ).*

Peter advises we humble ourselves, to remember who we are and in whom we believe. If our lives are just up to us, we have a lot to be anxious about. Of course, we know that we are God's and, as Peter writes, *God cares for us.* This is easy to believe when all is well; much harder when the future seems bleak; when we are lonely, grieving or afraid.

Humility cannot be episodic, a tool used when needed and otherwise put away. True humility is a way of life: living daily as best we can as God's own; giving ourselves to God, praying regularly, often; surrendering our mundane cares to God, doing that which bring us closer to God, letting go of what keeps us from God. Humility is wanting to be in passionate, life-changing relationship with the One beyond our knowing, yet the One who loves us eternally.

The cure for anxiety is not being brave or self-assured or learning more effective coping. All of that will come to us, but only as a fruit of humility. Humility says, "left to myself, I am weak, ignorant, afraid; yet with God's help, I will persevere. Even when anxious, I rely on God." Therefore, why would we hesitate to cast our anxieties on Christ, knowing He eternally cares for us?

Peter calls us to cast our anxiety on Christ with the admonition to discipline and alertness. He uses a vivid image: our soul's enemy hunts us for food, as a lion roaring at night. Here is an image C.S. Lewis used in his *Screwtape Letters*: to the Evil One we are food; sin fattens us for a diabolical feast. God has no desire to consume, but to fill.

There is evil in the world and in our lives; Jesus promises the Holy Spirit will lead us into truth, that we may discern that which fills—what accords with God's desires for us—and what fattens us for slaughter. Discipline is practicing what fills. Like humility, discipline is a way of life. If the word bothers you, think of it this way. God intends that our eternal happiness begin now in our mortal lives. Do what accords with God's purpose, and keep on until such thoughts, words and actions are habitual. Cultivate good and holy habits of the mind, spirit and body, and anxiety will find little foothold in your life.

*Cast all your anxieties on Christ.* How does one begin and continue? First pray, many times a day. Do not ask for humility; that leads you to wonder how humble you are. Rather, ask God to remove from you all that hinders you from living fully in Christ.

Second, as you become aware of stumbling blocks—unforgiveness, lust, envy, greed, sloth, anxiety, etc.—surrender the spiritual defect to God, generally and as often as you are aware of it.

Third, give thanks to God for the works already being done in your life. Thank God for everyone, everything, every situation. Gratitude is a spiritual antidote for almost everything that hinders us.

Fourth, ask to receive God's power, love and way of life. Do not rely on your own strength; make reliance on God's power, love and way of life the pattern for your life. Make this prayer habitual: (Jesus Prayer).

Fifth, practice the good habits of heart, mind, soul and body.

Sixth, be an active member of your faith community. You do not just 'attend Church.' We are the Body of Christ; when we gather, we make explicit and renew our corporate identity as Christ's own Body, given for the world's salvation. Even with our current restrictions we can still be active as members of Christ's Body.

Finally, faith is a verb. Do not have faith; be faithful, live faithfully as Christ's own for ever.

*Cast all your anxieties on Christ, for He cares for you.* Thanks be to God.