



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

December 12, 2021

Third Sunday of Advent

Paul says in today's second reading, "Have no anxiety at all." Well, how realistic is that? We have a lot of things to worry about. All signs point to anxiety on the increase in America, I would even say the World. Prozac and other related drugs are the most prescribed medicine on the market. Surveys show that Americans, rather than becoming more secure and confident, are becoming more worried and anxious. Studies also show that most of that anxiety does not make sense. One report claims that 40% of things that people worry about never happen; 30% have already happened; 12% of the people worry about what other people might say, 10% worry about possibly getting sick without any reason to do so. Therefore only 8% of anxiety can be traced to some real and present trouble. How do we then explain that 92% of anxiety seems to be prevailing and not connected to any objective or present reality?

Gerald May, a famous American psychologist, has an explanation. He believes that the cause for most of the anxiety in our country does not result from any exterior factors in our environment, but rather from forces within ourselves. Taking another step deeper, May, concludes that underneath that hurt what we discover is love. It is the desire to love and be loved that opens us to hurt. In other words, the second statement of Paul in the reading, is the solution. In everything offer prayer and petition to God and make our request known to Him. Mays suggests that what on the surface appears as anxiety is being caused by a trouble in our ability to give and receive love. If we have difficulty in loving and being loved, that causes hurt, which causes fear, which surfaces in anxiety.

Well, if this is true, then what are we to do about it? After all, if the basic problem is one of love, we cannot force people to love us. We cannot always go out and find someone to reciprocate our love. That is true. But the one thing that we can always do is to choose to act in love. We can always give ourselves in love to others. John the Baptist seems to know this in today's gospel. Because when people come to him and say, "What should we do?" his answer is to give, to share, to treat people with fairness and generosity. John the Baptist is telling us that when we give to others, we give to ourselves as well, and we facilitate God's kingdom.

Now this insight puts a whole different slant on what we mean by generosity. Most of the time when we choose to give to the poor, feed the hungry or visit the sick, we do so because we believe they need it. Of course, they do. But we often forget that those choices of loving are actions that we need as well. When we give ourselves to others in love, that has the power to heal our hurt, to reduce our fear, to lessen our anxiety. To put it in another way, it is hard to be preoccupied with our own anxiety when we are giving ourselves in love of others.

There are many opportunities for this kind of loving, particularly in this season of Advent. There are people and our families who need our attention. There are opportunities to serve the hungry, to participate in OLPH Advent/Lenten project, we can support the Ladies of Charity, contribute to countless institutions who would put our generosity to good use. But as you decide what to give and to whom, remember that the love which is given not only benefits the receiver but the giver as well. When we act in love, we heal our hurt, we lessen our fear, we reduce our anxiety.

When you find yourself worried and are unsure what is causing it, the gospel tells us not to obsess about our anxiety, but instead reach out to others in love. Because that love can ground us and strengthen us. That love can allow us to follow the advice of Paul and not worry about anything. Of course, if you prefer, you could address your anxiety by using Prozac or seeing a therapist. Such choices can at times be appropriate. But you should not forget that love is cheaper and often more effective.