

Anxiety vs. Vision and Peace Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time/A
October 5, 2014 9:00 AM Is 5:1-7; **Phil 4:6-9**; Mt 21:33-43 (Paul speaks of a faith that actually reaches out to God and depends on the support that God gives.)

“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”

Well, this is a tall order: “Have no anxiety at all,” especially today that has been rightly called the “age of anxiety.” Anxiety and depression are increasingly cited as major causes of personal dissatisfaction, mental stress, and the inability to maintain employment and happy relationships. Therapists try to teach coping skills; and at times medication can help, but we need to ask: **Why this rash of anxiety, and why now? Why this rash of depression, and why now?**

There is no simple answer, but we can patch together various factors that all add to a fundamental burden that people have to carry that can result in a general **loss of confidence and trust in life itself**, in the process of living. The first factor to note is the gradual but persistent **erosion of Christian faith in Europe and North America**. The West is becoming increasingly materialistic and irreligious. The overall Christian consensus has collapsed and with it the optimistic, hope-filled vision of life that it inspired. The value of life itself has been demoted. **The value and dignity of all human beings is openly questioned and denied**. Abortion is simply the tip of an iceberg; we have to really look at this iceberg. **Human solidarity, especially with the weaker and poorer members of our society, has become diluted**.

Materialism is grim, especially for those who are not particularly successful either at making money and succeeding or in denying the needs of the soul. Of course there are those who seemingly are content as they busy themselves with business and push questions to the fringe of their awareness or perhaps altogether outside of their awareness. But the writing is on the wall for those who can read it. Increasing violence and bizarre crimes are prophetic signs that **all is not well with the soul of our nation**.

Actually it’s good to question. Faith demands that we question. **God intends a world where people can thrive**, but this world doesn’t just happen willy-nilly. **It has to be built, developed, and on sound principles**. And how will we ever get to those sound principles unless we **think and reflect** and, yes, argue and **discuss and confront people of a different point of view and admit what we don’t know**. How else can we ever do this? **Is this what we are doing today?**

The world pretends that we really don’t have to search. All sorts of groups act as if they have the answers and everyone should fall in line. And many of these groups own newspapers and television stations. But the world certainly does not provide answers to the profound questions of life. Society does not provide a reason for living. Science does not provide a purpose for life or for the world. And yet **a healthy mind seeks answers to questions and wants to find meaning, and living souls are not content with mere material well-being**. But mere material well-being is the bottom line for the great

powerhouses, corporations, and for many politicians. These are the issues St. Paul is dealing with in his Letter to the Philippians.

Isaiah once noted that **“without vision the people perish.”** To allow life or the world or society to dictate what we should be or should do is the greatest foolishness. Of course we need to establish some foothold in the world. We have to adapt to the world to some degree. We have to have a basis to work from. Success is a worthy goal. But **jobs and families, vocations and activities are not ends in themselves. They should all lead somewhere to some overall purpose.**

St. Paul wrote this letter from prison where he was facing imminent death; and he was full of anxiety, but not for himself. He was anxious about his people, his church at Philippi. Would they survive? Would they maintain the faith? Would they hold onto the truth? He was **anxious for their spiritual health.** His point is that belief in **Christ provides a vision and a purpose for life,** and it contains enormous energy that can support and sustain us, even with all our problems and anxieties. But its power is not unleashed unless we actually commit to it wholeheartedly. **Too many people are initiated into the mysteries of Christ in a mechanical way.** They passively accept it, but do not intentionally embrace it. This kind of faith, if we call it faith, is not only ineffective, it's detrimental.

Paul speaks of a faith that actually reaches out to God and depends on the support that God gives. Then, he says, **the peace that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds.** This peace does not come from others' sympathy or counseling or medications, however good and necessary they may be. This peace is a gift from God. Elsewhere Paul compares salvation to an Olympic contest, that is: there is something to be won, in those days a crown, today it's a gold medal. But **it requires long sustained efforts and practice, practice, and more practice, with total dedication of mind and body.** So, yes, life is difficult, and modern life has special challenges. But we are not alone. **God is alive and active, gathering people in solidarity to be his kingdom on earth. And everyone here has a contribution to make.**