

[Readings: Gen. 18:1-10a; Psalm 15; Col. 1:24-28; Lk. 10:38-42]

A popular song decades ago – and sometimes still gets stuck in our heads – is “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” Today’s readings might be called, “Don’t Worry, Be Fearless.” Look at today’s First Reading. Abraham is dozing under a tree on a hot desert day when God arrives under the guise of three silent figures on the road. Does Abraham prostrate himself at their feet and remain in an attitude of perpetual adoration? Does he beg for wise teaching or seek moral instruction about certain matters pertaining to his neighbors in Sodom and Gomorrah? No, he springs into extreme hospitality that would have made Martha of Bethany envious. Even Martha Stewart might not have seen to the slaughter of a whole steer for the occasion, but when it comes to hosting, Abraham belongs in the hospitality Hall of Fame. The preparation of the steer also clues us in to the timetable upon which this meal depends. Abraham is banging pots and pans for quite a while before he exchanges one word with his august company. And this would have been in keeping with the Jewish moral code, which placed hospitality

In return for his hospitality, Abraham’s guests finally speak and promise him the one desire of his heart: a son. All of this is a long way of saying that once upon a time, God appreciated a good meal from a dedicated host. It would seem that “Mary’s way” is not always deemed the better part.

In today’s Second Reading this weekend, we hear Saint Paul say that in his sufferings he is “filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of His Body, which is the Church.” This can be a confusing teaching, after all how could anything be lacking in Christ’s sacrifice? Our Lord’s sacrifice upon the Cross was, of course, perfect and of infinite merit. His Blood atones for the sins of the world. That said, Jesus Himself, calls us to take up our crosses as we follow Him. While Christ’s offering of Himself to the Father was sufficient, we are still called to offer the sufferings that we bear in union with the Cross that Christ bore out of love for us.

This passage from Saint Paul reminds us that the crosses in our lives are not meaningless. If we use our cross to unite ourselves with Christ Crucified, our

suffering is transformed into an act of love for God. Christ willingly bore His Cross and laid down His life for us. He calls us to imitate Him and pour ourselves out for God Our Father.

Whenever we encounter suffering of any kind, we always have a choice how we will react. We can complain and try to escape our cross, or we can bear it out of love for God. We can ask to be delivered from our crosses—in the Garden Jesus prayed “Father, if it be possible, let this cup of suffering pass Me by.” Our Lord went on to add “Not My will, Father, but Thine be done.”

Whenever we have prayed to be delivered and the cross has not been lifted from us, we ought to offer that cross in union with Christ. Jesus did not shoulder His Cross begrudgingly: He willingly took up His Cross to save you and me. When we cannot escape the cross, let us not merely complain about it but rather remember to offer those sufferings in union with Christ. When we offer our sufferings as a sacrifice to God it adds weight to our prayers.

In this Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus speaks to us about our anxieties and worries. They distract us. They're harmful to us if we let them control our lives, because they take our eyes off of our Lord and focus us on what's going wrong and how it might get worse.

Mary chose the "better part" because she didn't let anything distract her from being a disciple learning avidly from Jesus. Mary is invited to do the same, to be fearless in the midst of her activities. When we make the time to put aside the busyness of life to sit quietly and learn from Jesus, we discover reasons why our worries aren't really so worrisome. Only as we sit quietly at the feet of Jesus do we find hope that overcomes despair, peace that conquers anxiety, and wisdom that gets us through trials. Even the littlest worry, such as Martha's concern that her kitchen chores wouldn't get done, is a sin when it takes our eyes off of Jesus. Nothing that distracts us from Jesus is ever good for us.

We cannot grow in holiness when we're not watching Jesus and learning from Him how to be holy. We cannot love as He loves nor receive all the love He gives us unless we have a prayer life that includes quiet time alone with Him, drinking up His lessons and His loving embrace.

Anxieties and worries are varying degrees of fear: We're afraid that something bad is going to happen. Even when there's a legitimate reason to worry, fear blocks our view of Jesus, because it turns us away from Him. We need to recognize fear as a warning flag telling us to slow down, quiet down, and sit down with Jesus for a good discussion on whatever it is that's bothering us.

He's got the answers, the encouragement, and the affirmation that will bring us peace. What has been worrying you lately? What are you anxious about? What are you fearing might happen? Take them to Jesus in a quiet prayer time. Think about them while you are in the busy-ness of your daily living.

What lessons is Jesus trying to teach you in those situations? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you learn from Jesus. Search the Bible for additional inspiration. Share hospitality with others. It's amazing what can happen when you share a meal with a friend – the insights, the discoveries. What are some of the ways we can slow down our lives and improve our prayer times?

Then, after all this, we can say indeed: "Don't worry, be fearless." AMEN!