

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR “A”

This past Tuesday on my day off, I saw my niece Bridget Fitzpatrick. Bridget is fourteen years old and a freshman at Upper St. Clair High School. “How are you doing?” I asked. She responded, “Uncle Dave, I am so stressed out.” Trying not to laugh, I said. “Stressed? You’re in ninth grade. What are you going to do when you are in College? Or when you have a family?” I guess stress escapes no one. The good news is, however, I had breakfast with my youngest niece this past week, she’s 1 ½ - and she gave no indication of being stressed.

STRESS – more and more it seems that stress is as much a part of our lives as the air we breathe. The reality of stress is encompassed by many words like, worry, preoccupation, fear, concern, anguish, alarm and dread. Perhaps the most commonly used word is ANXIETY. The dictionary defines anxiety as “painful or apprehensive uneasiness of mind over an impending or anticipated ill; an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear marked by physiological signs as sweating, tension and increased pulse, by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat.”

Virtually all of us in our humanness understand this definition of anxiety because we witness it playing out in our daily lives. Some of the things that create anxiety are illness, change, loss, work, relationships, age etc. And the interesting statistic on humans and anxiety is that much of anxiety is self created and almost 90% of the things we worry about never happen. Nevertheless anxiety keeps riddling our hearts.

St. Paul had every reason to be filled with anxiety in as much as today’s selection from Philippians has him situated in prison. And yet, it is not his anxiety that he is worried about – it’s the Philippians. He writes, “Brothers and sisters: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”

St. Paul not only tells the Philippians to dismiss anxiety, but he also gives to them a strategy to do just that. And the strategy comes down to PRAYER. Anxiety is not a time to fall down and collapse. No anxiety is a time to fall into the arms of the Lord in confidence and trust, knowing that He and He alone is in control. The experience of prayer reminds us that we are never alone nor are we in control. You know so much of our anxiety results from our erroneous belief that we are in control. God is in control and when we leave the driving to Him, there is a wonderful peace that can arise. St. Paul acknowledges this presence of peace in today’s letter when after telling the Philippians to get rid of anxiety by prayer, he writes, “Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

The next time we find ourselves overcome with anxiety, for whatever reason, we need not become stressed. What we need to do is pray – giving our anxiety to the Lord, for He is in control, then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. And when someone approaches us and asks, “How are you doing?” we can respond by saying, “I am at peace because I pray!”