

What are we afraid of?

Fear has the power, especially naturally speaking, to keep us alive. The fear response can help us to protect ourselves, be aware of physical, emotional, and spiritual threats and to fight or flee the challenges and uncertainties of life. However, fear can paralyze us and keep us from taking the necessary steps to fulfill our callings in life. A specific type of fear on display in this weekend's readings from two heroes of faith, Isaiah and Peter, was the fear of unworthiness.

Both Isaiah and Peter are made aware of the Lord's power and holiness, and they were afraid. When seeing the holiness of God, Isaiah said: ***"Woe is me I am doomed, for I am a man of unclean lips."*** When seeing Jesus' divine power at work, Peter said: ***"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."*** Yet they were both called by the Lord. Jesus didn't let Peter run away but said: ***"Do not be afraid."*** They both thought that they weren't good enough, that they weren't adequate or worthy of the call and so they wanted God to leave them. They wanted the Lord to remove His light and glory because then they thought they would be safe. That is not how we will find safety and the strength to go forward.

Everyone, young or old, single or married, has fears about being able to fulfill their potential. I remember my mother saying about when she was a young wife and mother for the first time, that when she was twenty years old leaving the hospital with my older brother, she said to the nurse with some anxiety "come home with me" still wanting the training wheels as a new mother. But with learning curves she did it!

Isaiah and Peter and all of us are right in saying that we are sinners and not worthy, but the Lord already knows that. The Lord does not ask us to go alone. We are all weak, limited creatures, and some types of fear will always accompany us. St. Peter would continue to struggle throughout his life with the natural fear to want to preserve his life when persecutions for Christ manifested.

There is a tradition that when Nero blamed the Christians in Rome for the fire he started and he began persecuting them, Peter was going to flee the city, and his flock out of fear. While leaving he saw the Lord walking to Rome. Peter asked Him: "Dominus, quo Vadis?" (Lord, where are you going?) Jesus responded: "I am going to Rome, to be crucified again." Peter got courage from this and returned to Rome for the martyrdom by crucifixion upside down, as the Lord had foretold.

John Wayne once said: *"Courage is being scared to death...and saddling up anyway."* Olympic athletes are often asked, either before or after their event, if they were nervous. All of them have the same jitters and butterflies, some may even throw up before the event. They deal with those nerves by first accepting that they exist, they're natural and can't be avoided. Some even refer to that nervous energy as excitement, which helps them focus on the gift of talent they get to offer the world.

Our own patroness, Elizabeth of the Trinity, was an award-winning pianist at age 13 and was asked how she could remain so calm and focused when she played before hundreds of people. She once said that she played her piano as if Jesus were the only one who could hear her. "When I can no longer pray, I play," she told a friend. We may be inadequate at times from a human perspective, but we are never alone.

Do not be afraid,

Fr. Mike

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