

Word for Sunday

Prayer Brings Us God's Peace

By Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mt. 21:33-43. (R1) Is. 5:1-7. (R2) Phil. 4:6-9.

Paul's letter to the Philippians in next Sunday's readings is so beautiful that I am going to bypass the vineyard theme and center on the Pauline pericope.



Fr. Shamon

Paul loved the Philippians. They were his first converts in the Western world (Acts 16). They were the only ones from whom Paul would accept money. In fact, he

wrote this letter in part as a thank-you to them for gifts recently received.

Paul's letter to the Philippians is one of his most beautiful. That letter radiates his love, joy and tenderness for them. Paul writes of joy in suffering (Ch. 1), joy in service (Ch. 2), joy in praying (Ch. 3), and joy in anxiety (Ch. 4) Sunday's first reading.

"Dismiss all anxiety from your minds," Paul wrote. By anxiety he meant all unreasonable concern, worry, especially about material things: what to eat, to drink, to wear, to earn, and so on. Anxiety is projection into the future. The future does not exist. It belongs to God. God is our Father. Therefore, we are told to do what kids do — "dismiss all anxiety."

Whenever we project into the future, we climb a fence and trespass on land that is not ours, but God's. When we do this He will scourge us back into our own territory — the land of the present, the right now. Therefore, "dismiss" all anxiety — get rid of worry, not work; get rid of excessive concern, not industry.

Why dismiss worry?

First, it does absolutely no good to worry. Our Lord said, "Who of us by taking thought can add to his height even a single inch?"

Then too, worry depresses, makes us unfit to do God's work.

A merry heart goes all day,

A sad one tires in a mile.

Furthermore, worry saps our energies, makes us unfit for present problems. The mind goes round and round, like a merry-go-round. It covers the same

ground again and again, like running on a treadmill. In a word, worry gets us nowhere, just wears us out. It is the most futile of all exercises.

But how can we get rid of anxiety, worry? Paul's answer is by prayer.

"Present your needs to God in every form of prayer." The two forms Paul speaks of are prayers of petition and prayers of gratitude. Some men pray and they do well. Some men do not give thanks and they do badly. Prayer, like breathing, must be a double action: a taking in and a giving out — a receiving in answer to asking, and a giving thanks for having received. To pray and not to give thanks is a flower that has no scent.

If, however, we pray as Paul advised, then God's peace, like a sentinel, will never let excessive worry or anxiety steal into the garrison of our minds and hearts.

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