

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

What word would you use to describe a troubled heart? Fear? Anger? Envy? Stressed? Bitter? Worried? The list could go on and on. Our hearts are troubled by many things. My guess is that most of them can be boiled down to fear. Our basic problem is fear.

That too was the problem of the disciples as Jesus is preparing them for his leaving them. This Final Discourse that begins with the 14th Chapter of John's Gospel is given by Jesus immediately before the Last Supper, his arrest, imprisonment, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. These pre-Resurrection disciples are scared to death. They know Jesus is targeted by both the Jewish and Roman leaders. He is turning out not to be the messiah they were hoping he was. They're afraid for their own lives. They left everything to follow him, and now it's coming to a bitter end.

It is to them that Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me." He also speaks these words to those of us who have troubled hearts. Troubled or fearful about our health or our jobs or our children or our parents or any of the hundreds of fears or worries that weigh so many of us down. How can faith in God, faith in Jesus relieve our troubled hearts and still the fears and worries that sometimes overwhelm us?

First of all, it changes our perspective. Faith in God reminds us of whose we are and who we are, as we're told today in the first Letter of St. Peter, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light". When we step back for a moment to recognize that God has chosen us as his very own, it gives us courage to face our fears and not allow them to overwhelm us. It helps us to take the long view, realizing the things we are worrying about today will be old news tomorrow.

My old friend, Tug McGraw, the late beloved relief pitcher for the Phillies, and before that for the Mets, had a wonderful philosophy of pitching. He called it his "frozen snowball" theory. "If I come in to pitch with the bases loaded," Tug explained, "and a heavy hitter like Willie Stargell is at bat, there's no reason I want to throw the ball. I'm scared to death. But, I have to pitch. So I remind myself that in a few billion years the earth will become a frozen snowball hurtling through space, and nobody's going to care what Willie Stargell did with the bases loaded." Tug overcame his fear by changing his perspective and taking the long view.

Our Gospel text ends today with Jesus speaking these words to his pre-Resurrection disciples and now to us, his post-Resurrection disciples, "The Father who dwells in me is doing his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves. Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father".

We are blessed because as post-Resurrection disciples we have a totally different perspective than those who still had to endure his Passion and Death. Jesus wants our hearts untroubled and our fears resolved because he has work for us to do today—“the works he did and greater far than these”—these included healing the sick, washing the feet of others, feeding the multitudes, throwing arms of forgiveness around prodigal sons and daughters, speaking truth to power.

The late Senator Robert F. Kennedy wrote about these “works,” and the ones that represent the “greater ones than these” that we are called to do in these words, “It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. Crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples will build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”

We can do this by stop worrying over those things that trouble our hearts and focusing our lives on doing the “works” that Jesus calls us to do. And we can do them because we’re not just anybody, we are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own...” We are different from everyone else. We belong to God. We are his presence in this world. We are his face, his voice, his hands, his feet, his heart.

How, you might ask, can you know what are the “works” you are called to do? David’s Drive 831, which we are concluding today, is a great example. Picture, if you will, the dignity that the broken hero at the VA will feel as he pulls on the underwear you have so generously provided. That “work” came out of the heart of a young man horrified by the fact these heroes had no underwear and the desire of parents to honor the memory of their deceased son.

What “works” are you called to do? What in the world today most breaks your heart or most offends your sense of justice or most inspires passion within you? Do that, in Jesus name, as the child of God. Trust me, you won’t have time for a troubled heart.