

This week a call came into the Rectory. Mary Beth, my ever-faithful, loyal, and most gracious secretary, became outraged when she called said, “I want to talk to the chief hog of the trough.” She responded, “Sir, don’t dare talk about our pastor, Fr. Eschbach, like that.” “Sorry!” said the caller. “I just wanted to donate \$1,000,000.00 to the church!” Quickly, and very sweetly, Mary Beth said, “Oh! Please wait a minute. Here comes the big fat pig now!”

That’s right! For a million bucks you can call me anything you want!

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I dare to say that I doubt there is anyone here who doesn’t have a troubled or fearful heart. If you don’t have enough troubles of your own, you just have to turn on the television and you’ll be told to be troubled or fearful about Isis or the Zika virus or Donald or Ted or Hillary or Bernie. Apparently nobody is worried or fearful of John Kasich.

We do live in troubled times. That’s for sure! And no laughing matter. That’s why Jesus’ words to us today are so comforting: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

Now, it’s important to realize that according to this account of St. John, who was an eyewitness, that Jesus spoke these words to his disciples right before he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he would be arrested. He was preparing them for the troubles to come—his arrest, imprisonment, torture, and death on the Cross of Calvary. He’s telling them that no matter how terrible things appear to be, his gift of peace will sustain them.

His gift of peace he told them was not the kind of peace that the world can give. His gift of peace was what they would need—tough stuff for tough times.

You and I may not be facing the challenges that the early disciples of Jesus faced—no gladiator pits, lions, swords, or crosses. But we all carry heavy burdens: how to meet the mortgage and still save for the kids education; facing unemployment in a troubled economy; dealing with sickness, either personally or with a loved one; and as we age trying to figure out how to just meet the co-pays for our doctors' visits and medications.

Whatever our issue is, life happens and when it does it sometimes sends our world into a tail spin. It's in those times that we need the tough stuff which Jesus offers today—his gift of peace that the world cannot give. That gift is the inner peace that he speaks of today: "The Advocate, the holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, and teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." The Holy Spirit who dwells within us gives us the courage to hold on and hold out, not allowing us to sink into the depths of despair.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives us hope, that ability to believe that God did not bring us this far to leave us now; to trust that through his gracious love everything will work out, and that our well-being is his deepest desire for us.

The thing about hopelessness is that it makes us feel helpless because we see no way out. Abiding in Christ's peace reminds us that there is always hope, and so we can keep moving forward and refuse to give up.

I'm not telling you this as some theological treatise. Rather, I have experienced the truth of what I am saying in my own life. When I was 35 years old and they first operated on my leg, I was told that more than likely they would have to amputate it, and, if not, they would probably have to take out so much muscle tissue, I would need a brace to walk with. I took a deep breath and said, "Lord, I entrust myself to you." After five more surgeries, I told them no more because I was on the verge of becoming addicted to pain killers.

Here I am 37 years later, still walking on my own leg, without a brace. And, all I can say is, "Thank you, Lord". Now, it is true every morning I wake up with incredible pain that shoots through my leg and seems to envelop my whole body, but when I experience that pain, I still say, "Thank you, Lord," because I still have my leg and I trust the pain will eventually subside. "Thank you, Lord!"

More recently, as many of you know, I developed this disease in the retina of my right eye. I was told the only thing that would save my sight was to get injections of medication directly into my eye. I said, "No, I can't do that." The doctor said simply, "Well, then you will lose your sight." So, once again, I had to say, "Lord, I entrust myself to you," swallow my fear, and allow the injection to take place. So far, I've had to have six injections and will probably have to face another one on Wednesday this week. And all I can say is , "Thank you, Lord! I can see!"

Do you understand what I am telling you? It is the greatest good news we will ever hear. No matter what our circumstances, Christ will be with us.

I know that some of you are concerned about your future. As you age, you wonder if you will have enough financial resources to last you for the rest of your lives. Will your health hold up? Some are concerned about your children's futures. A few are worrying about aging parents. Others are wondering if they will ever be able to go on after losing a loved one. Someone has said the best thing about tomorrow is that tomorrow only comes one day at a time.

A biblical scholar once surveyed the Scriptures to discover the most significant words in all the Bible. He wanted to find the saddest word, the happiest word, the most emotional word, and so on. When he came to the Bible's most dangerous word, he identified it as tomorrow. The word tomorrow is a thief, he said, that robs dreamers of their dreams and the talented of their greatest achievements. It keeps men and women from coming to Christ and discovering the kind of life God wants them to have. A great preacher agrees, "Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow!" he proclaimed, "Tomorrow never comes. It is in no calendar except in the almanac of fools." The secret of abundant life is to entrust the future to God and to live for today.

Someone else put it this way, "By the yard, life is hard; by the inch it's a cinch." All too often we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by our problems, and we lose our perspective. The present fear, the worry of the moment, the problem we face, can suggest to us that it is the end of the world. It is in those moments that we have to call up the tough stuff for the tough times that Jesus gives us—that inner peace that allows us to trust God in every circumstance of our lives.

I know there are some of you who will allow this message to go in one ear and out the other. Some seem to have it in their DNA—to worry.

One of the stereotypes about Jews is that they worry a lot. A Jewish author, Arnie Plotkin, wrote a book entitled, *14,000 Things for Jews to be Happy about*. He wrote the book to brighten the mood of his constitutionally worry-prone people. The book was a total commercial failure, until he changed the title to *14,000 Things That Could Go Wrong*. The book became a best-seller.

It appears many Jews would rather worry than find reasons to be happy. There are a whole lot of us Christians like that too. Maybe it's time to listen to Jesus speak a good Jewish word to our hearts—SHALOM! PEACE!** “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.” **PEACE! SHALOM!****