

June 1, 2008

Communion

Title: Good for the Soul  
Scripture: The everlasting love of the Lord: Isaiah 49:14-16  
Do not worry about tomorrow: Matthew 6:25-34

Prayer: Holy Spirit, giving life to all, washing us clean, wiping out our mistakes, healing our wounds, you are our true life, awakening the heart from its drowsy sleep. Amen.

Hildegard of Bingen, 12th Century

We all want to live longer and are looking for ways to do that. A friend of ours recently encouraged us to go on line to the web site Life Expectancy Calculator. So we did. After completing a number of questions about our age, health, eating habits and amount of stress in our lives it gave us our scores for our 'virtual age' and life expectancy. Felix's virtual age is 59 and he is going to live to 105 years. He warns me of this often.

for healthy eating and a long life consider this recent report:

- The Japanese eat very little fat and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.
- The French eat a lot of fat and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.
- The Japanese drink very little red wine and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.
- The Italians drink excessive amounts of red wine and also suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.
- The Germans drink a lot of beer and eat lots of sausages and fats and suffer fewer heart attacks than the British or Americans.
- Conclusion: Eat and drink what you like. Apparently, speaking English is what kills you.

Everyone worries. Most things we worry about don't happen; but, we still spend time and energy worrying about them. So here's a friendly way to get rid of your worries. Just sit down at your computer, get on the Internet and go to The Worry Bank. When you get there you, too, can 'deposit your worries' into the worry bank and poof, they are gone. Disappeared into the great unknown of cyber space.

Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Was it worth it?

To be free of worry: "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow....are you not of more value than these?" Familiar words from scripture that we heard this morning. It is beautiful poetry with a beautiful message. Look up at the graceful gliding of the birds as they fly above. Look at the beauty of the lilies and how they sway to the gentle rhythms of the morning breeze. Without a worry, the birds find food. Without a worry, the lilies grow. How much more will God provide for you.

Perhaps this is why we are captivated by watching the seagulls fly and soar through the air and why we take the time to watch the flowers grow. Without a sound the flowers display the miraculous beauty of creation itself. Even the Bible speaks of the beauty of nature when it reports that the beauty of Solomon's temple which was covered with gold and precious jewels

doesn't measure up to the beauty of the flowers. All the wealth in the world cannot create such beauty.

Do not worry. Do not fret. Do not be anxious. That seems to be the message for the day. No need to worry about food for your family. Don't spend your time worrying if you will have clothes to wear. And concerns about tomorrow - let go of all those issues like care of aging parents, the next doctor's report, paying \$5-6-8 a gallon for gas, pollution of the environment, peace on earth. Don't be anxious about these things. Keep looking at the birds. Keep smelling the flowers.

Wow!! I don't know about you, but in my 'real world' this isn't going to work for me. I must admit, I am a dismal failure of this kind of a spiritual journey. Just thinking about my inadequacy to live up to this message of letting go makes me more anxious.

To make matters worse, I went to the doctors this week for a regular check up and for the first time in my life my blood pressure was up. Not terribly high, but not good either. My doctors recommendation - No surprises. We all know the drill - eat less salt and fat, do exercise, loose weight.

And then she asked, "Are you under a lot more stress these days?" Stress, of course, is one the greatest causes of high blood pressure. That's when the doctor recommended regular meditation.

So lets look at some medical research to find out why it is that doctors recommend meditation and prayer as a prescription for healthier bodies.

Last year the Mayo Clinic published their findings of a research project that began in the 1960's. It followed the lives of 7,000 young people from the University of North Carolina. The focus of the study was on those people who worry much of the time and are afraid that things won't work out. And it had a focus on those who have less stress in their lives and are generally optimistic - optimistic meaning 'to be of good cheer.' The final report, "The worriers had a significantly greater likelihood of dying sooner than did the optimists. And that less stress is associated with increased survival."

These results of that study should surprise even Jesus! If you live a life free of chronic worry you add years to your lifespan. Yes, that's right - not hours or days, but years added to your life when you are free of worry!

What a relief. Science and Jesus in agreement. It is good to hear Jesus saying, "Do not worry."

But here's the problem: Normal anxiety is unavoidable. It comes to almost everybody. If everyone feels some anxiety, than surely we should not feel guilty about it. It is also a very natural thing to feel our own vulnerability to the forces of nature and the forces of global warming, to sickness and to death, and we ought not to feel guilty about that either.

Another thing, normal worry causes us to take preventative measures. It is a good thing to worry enough about our health to go for regular exams and take our pills as prescribed. It is a good

thing to save money for retirement, to have car insurance, to close the window before it rains, to make plans for the future. In addition, it is worry that gets us motivated and gives us energy to take care of things in our own lives and in the world around us.

We have just named three good things about having some stress and worry in our lives: 1: It is unavoidable so we shouldn't feel guilty. 2: It protects us from possible problems. 3: It gives us energy to get things done. And, there is a 4th good reason: It may indeed save our lives.

But things can get out of hand when worrying becomes unending chatter in our mind. You keep hearing in your head: "This may not work out. That plan could fall short. Someone may slip up. Did I consider every possible outcome." And finally, the most debilitating of all, "Whatever can go wrong, will."

In our household, we call this last mind twister - Whatever can go wrong, will. - we call that - horriblizing. (Yes, we made up the word.) Just the other day when I got the high blood pressure report I was sure I was going to have a stroke any minute. "You're horriblizing again," comes the voice of reason from across the room.

Such pessimism has no confidence that things will work out. It can breed despair. It can result in what is called 'living in un-hope.' To live with un-hope is the tendency to take a gloomy view of life and make the assumption that most things will ultimately end badly. To live like this surely produces an unending supply of worry and anxiety. On these days, hope and trust in the blessings of life don't have a chance.

How can we keep our anxieties under control? The answer isn't to withdraw from family and community. The answer isn't to arrange your life to have less responsibilities and fewer relationships. And, I don't think the answer comes from eating whatever you want and depositing your worries into your computer.

We keep looking for what is good for our health and ways to lower our stress. Jesus has a suggestion, a suggestion that is good for the soul: "Look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap...Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow." Watch the graceful motions of the birds as they fly above your head. Look at the beauty of the lilies and how they sway to the gentle rhythms of the morning breeze. And know how much more God will provide for you. Amen.