

HOMILY ~ FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

JANUARY 27/28, 2024

We have learned over the past few weeks how snow, ice, cold and wind can render us very powerless. Our plans for the day have to change drastically when the power goes out: we lose internet access, our children are unexpectedly home from school, it takes us forever to get to work, or it is just not safe to drive and we are stuck at home. This can cause a great deal of anxiety.

In the Second Reading today, St. Paul tells us, *"I should like you to be free of anxieties."* We all have some anxiety; that is part of life. St. Paul tells us that whether we are male or female, married or single, we all have reasons to have anxiety. So how do we get rid of that anxiety? I think we can eliminate much of the anxiety we experience in our lives if we have Spiritual Hope.

We cannot live without hope. A lack of hope leads us to the conclusion that life is bad; and things will never get better, which leads to anxiety, depression, anger and aggression. We cannot live without hope, but there are different types of hope. One type of hope is Egoic Hope. If we have Egoic Hope, we hope for very specific things. *I hope to get an "A" on this paper. I hope to get the job I am interviewing for today. I hope the paint job I am having at home will be perfect.* With this type of spirituality, if we pray, we pray for very specific things; and we expect God to provide it.

To begin with, we may be hoping for the wrong thing; and God will certainly not provide something that is bad for us. We think if we just get what we want, we will be happy; but that is not true. You just want something else. This sets us on a rollercoaster of *"ups and downs."* We are delighted when things go as planned, and we are devastated when they do not. We are also anxious and worried that things will not turn out the way we want in the future. We start living for the future, filled with anxiety; and we miss our lives today. Things never turn out exactly as planned. Things happen in life, like the weather, that are out of our control. We start focusing upon the little things that are not important in the overall scheme of things. The grade we get on one exam just is not that

important. If we have Egoic Hope, we are overly dependent upon ourselves. I have to figure out what is best for me, and make a plan to carry it out. We live in the past and the future, which fills us with anxiety. If we bring God into it at all, we expect him to carry out our plan.

Spiritual Hope is much different. If we have Spiritual Hope, we set a general direction for our lives. This is based upon the big picture things that are important in our lives. This probably involves your calling. What God is calling you to do to serve others, the things that God has given you the charisms to do. These things give your life meaning and purpose. You trust that God will travel the journey with you and direct your course. When things happen that are out of your control, like the weather, you trust that God will redirect you. You can put your life in God's hands because God is all-powerful.

As we learned in the Gospel Reading, Jesus provides "*A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.*" You do not have to worry about the future. You can let your life unfold every day and take things as they come. Maybe God has a different plan for you than you have for yourself. Maybe certain things happen for a reason that may not be clear now and may never be clear. You do not live for the future. You live each day because that is what counts. When things happen that you have not planned, you can take that in stride. When ice, snow, wind and cold happen, it does not have to ruin your day. Your day does not have to be filled with anxiety. Maybe you can make the best of what happens. A day without the internet could be great. You may have a great day at home with your kids. Maybe what life has in store is much better than what you planned. Maybe you do not have to live on the rollercoaster of "*ups and downs.*" With Spiritual Hope, you can take each day as it comes and appreciate what life brings each day. It will not relieve all of your anxiety, as St. Paul would like, but developing Spiritual Hope will certainly help.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim