GOD’S WORD CALMS AN ANXIOUS HEART

How people can find healing in God’s Word.
God’s Word Calms An Anxious Heart

New Opportunities

“My heart pounds within me!” “My thoughts disturb me!” “My heart desairs!” These are but a few heartfelt complaints to God we find in the Book of Psalms; grievances from those who were afflicted with anxiety. When predictable patterns of life are disrupted and the supports of life are no longer guaranteed, symptoms such as a fast-beating heart, negative self-talk and bitter expectations often follow. These experiences are not only characteristic of men and women in the Bible who experienced great trials, but they characterize an increasing number of people in the 21st century. For many, anxiety has become chronic, ongoing and, yes, even a way of life! Since the onset of the pandemic, anxiety and depression rates in Americans have more than doubled. In fact, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that adults reporting symptoms of anxiety have increased from 11% in 2019 to 41% in 2021.

Yet, in God’s Word, people can find healing from anxiety. In God’s Word, Jesus is truly present whenever it is spoken, whenever it is read and whenever it is reflected upon. And through the ministry of the Catholic Church, the healing effects of God’s Word are accessible in personal prayer, small group faith-sharing and healing ministry. For this reason, daily Bible reading and the sharing of the Gospel with friends and family are of critical importance today. People are still turning to the Church when they need help. I would argue that many among them are people looking for relief from their anxiety. Perhaps, this is why more people within the Diocese of Green Bay are turning to healing ministries where they can find healing in the comforting embrace of God’s Word.

Anxiety Relief

In Philippians 4, there are four spiritual “Rs” that can help to keep anxiety at bay. With time and dedication, these four Rs can help: 1. Rejoice 2. Request 3. Release 4. Reflect.

St. Paul wrote the following to the Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near: Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:4-8).

Rejoice

It’s a choice to rejoice! With the first R, St. Paul has us “rejoice in the Lord always.” He even drives home the point by repeating it: “I shall say it again: rejoice.” Rejoicing in the Lord is, no doubt, a very difficult thing to do when we are fearful and anxious. It may even seem foolish and counterintuitive for those who never learned this discipline. We might ask, “Does God really expect us to rejoice in him when the ability to pay this month’s bills is difficult, or when our job security is in question, or when we are awaiting the results of a biopsy?” The answer to the question is “yes!” In Psalm 121, it says, “I have lifted my eyes to the mountains, from where help will come to me” (Psalm 121:1). Rest assured, God does not want us to focus on the mess. Why? Because our human weakness is such that we tend to concentrate exclusively on the problem. As such, we lose perspective. We feel discouraged. What follows is that despair enters into our hearts. I know several people who had to quit watching the news altogether earlier this year. The political unrest and the pandemic were leading them into a state of paralysis. What is true for us was also true for Jesus’s followers in the Gospels accounts.

To counter the natural habit of focusing too much on the mess, Jesus taught his apostles to focus on him when they encountered trouble. The threatening waves of the sea while fishing or an unforeseen food shortage during a retreat in the wilderness were opportunities for his disciples to rejoice in his saving works even before they were manifested. Repeatedly, within the pages of Scripture, God assures us that he can be trusted. As such, we are asked to make a choice to rejoice in his promises.
Request

Now that we have “learned to savor how good the Lord is” (Psalm 34:9), we are now in a better position to make our request known to him. This is why St. Paul insists, “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.” With expectant faith and grateful hearts, we can be confident that our Heavenly Father will attend to our request. As such, the “peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts.”

The Holy Spirit, as our Comforter, often inspires us to rest in the knowledge that God is greater than our problem. And, although we do not know what the future holds for us, we can be confident that God, who is above time and space, is already in the future working out the solution to our problem; solutions that we have not thought of yet.

Yet, if truth be told, trust is something we do all the time when we get our car fixed at the auto shop or get an appliance repaired at a hardware store. In doing so, we let these experts do their work without the need to micromanage them. In releasing our cares to God, he is asking us to give him the same courtesy. Just as we trust experts in their expertise to fix things, God is asking us to trust in his word and in his promises. In the interim, when anxious thoughts continue to make themselves felt in our mind, we can answer them: “I have released this my Heaven Father. He is taking care of it.” Easier said than done, right? Even with this step, God’s help is at hand.

Reflect

Anxious thoughts and negative self-talk cannot be cancelled, it must be “crowded out.” St. Paul directs us to the fourth R by asking his readers to reflect on “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious” and whatever is “worthy of praise.” Indeed, the space that was once occupied with worrisome and anxious thoughts needs to be replaced by these reflections. This, coupled with counting our blessings, will equip us to see beyond the appearance of adversity.

Release

This third R is implicit in St. Paul’s counsel to the Philippians; implicit, but necessary. And that third R is to release and entrust your cares to the Lord. This exhortation is repeated by St. Peter when he says, “Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Releasing your cares to the Lord and leaving them with him is a difficult but necessary step in helping to reduce anxiety. In the interim, between making your request known to God and his answer, there is often a time of waiting. This waiting period requires, to be sure, trust and discipline on our part.

Final Thoughts

The rising levels of anxiety and depression in our communities speaks to a need to raise an awareness of both mental health and spiritual health. Personal devotion to God’s Word, small group faith-sharing and healing ministry can help with this. Now, more than ever, people are looking for relief from their anxiety and worries. Here are two examples where these needs are being met in the Diocese of Green Bay:

• Newman Center at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh: Fr. Zach Weber will host “The Well” for college students at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 15, at the St. Peter site of Most Blessed Sacrament Parish: 449 High Drive, Oshkosh. The event includes Eucharistic adoration, praise, worship, prayer ministry and the sacrament of reconciliation with Mass to follow at 9 p.m.

• Most Blessed Sacrament Parish in Oshkosh: healing prayer ministry is offered after every weekend Mass (Saturday 4 p.m., Sunday 8:30 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.) at each site in the prayer area.

If you have any questions about these and other opportunities in the Diocese of Green Bay, please feel free to contact me, Joe Tremblay, parish evangelization director, at (920) 272-8313 or email me at jtremblay@gbdioc.org. Thank you.
As Missionary Disciples, Catholic Charities labors in the streets, inviting and serving those who have been left out or felt alone to know and experience the tremendous and abundant love of God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

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