

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

Zephaniah 3:14-18 Philippians 4:4-7 Luke 3:10-18

Viktor Frankl in his book **“Man’s Search for Meaning”** narrates how one day in the concentration camp, the Gestapo ordered him to strip. He obediently did as directed and stood before his persecutors stark naked but with his head held high. The only possession on his person was his wedding band. Walking up to him, one of the guards grabbed his hand and forcibly pulled it off his finger. Viktor sheepishly submitted –he just had no alternative. But even as he suffered this shameful indignity, he said to himself, “You can take away my wife, you can take away my children, you can strip me of my clothes, but there is one thing no person can ever take from me –and that is my freedom to choose how I react to what happens to me!” **That was Viktor Frankl’s resolute determination and that was the secret of his ultimate victory.** In his own words: **“Happiness is a choice which ultimately transforms our tragedies into triumphs.”** - No one takes away our joy and happiness! It is our choice! Viktor Frankl

In today's 2nd reading, Paul gives us some important, practical advice, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4) and "Do not worry about anything" (4:6). Doesn't this sound like the famous hit by Bobby McFerrin, Don't Worry Be Happy? Even though we live in a world that is chock-full of toys, comforts and luxuries yet fewer and fewer people seem to experience true peace and satisfaction in their lives. Rather we continue to experience more and more worry and anxiety. Life is full of problems, as Bobby McFerrin admits, yet he goes on to advise us not to worry:

In every life we have some trouble/ When you worry you make it double/ Don't worry, be happy.
Ain't got no place to lay your head/ Somebody came and took your bed/ Don't worry, be happy.
The landlord say your rent is late/ He may have to litigate/ Don't worry, be happy.
Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style/ Ain't got no gal to make you smile/ But don't worry, be happy.

Yet there is a big difference between St Paul and Bobby McFerrin on this issue. Bobby McFerrin tells us "Don't worry, be happy" without telling us why we should be happy or more importantly how to not worry. Paul, on the other hand tells us in today's reading both why we should be happy and how we can dissolve our worries and attain happiness. **Here we have Paul's key to happiness.**

The first part of the reading tells us why we should be happy and not worry. **"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.** Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near" We should be happy not because everything is going well with us right now, not because our health and finances are in great shape, not even because someone has bought us a big Christmas present, but simply because the Lord is near. We should be happy not because of what we have seen in the past or what we see today but because of what we shall see tomorrow. It is a happiness that springs from the faith and the hope that our Lord is coming to wipe away the tears from all eyes.

I can think of a friend of mine who was diagnosed of leukemia around this time some years back. Before he died only weeks later he asked me, "But why me? I never smoked or touched a drink in my

life. I know people who smoke and drink and do all the wrong things and yet they never got cancer. So why me?" I wish I knew the answer.

No one really knows the answer. But Paul today reassures us that the coming of the Lord will be a happy surprise for those who believe and hope in Him. It helps if we remember that Paul is writing these words from the dark walls of a Roman prison where he was not sure of coming out alive. So here he is teaching us not only by word but by example as well. "Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near." The Lord is coming. "And all shall be well. And all manner of things shall be well"

How could one keep from worrying when one is surrounded by apparently unbeatable problems and difficulties? Look at the fable.

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well that the farmer had accidentally left uncovered. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do. Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway, so it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

He instructed the workers to fill the well with dirt. They all grabbed a shovel and began to shovel dirt into the well. At first, the donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement he quieted down.

A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astonished at what he saw. With each shovel of dirt that hit his back, the donkey was doing something amazing. He would shake it off and take a step up.

Pretty soon, everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off!

Life is going to shovel dirt or worries on you, all kinds of worries. The trick to getting out of the worry is to shake it off and take a step up. Each of our troubles is a steppingstone. We can get out of the deepest wells just by not stopping, never giving up! Shake it off and take a step up.

That is what Paul tells us in the second part of the reading. **"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."**

In every situation, in every difficulty or problem, in all circumstances, Paul knows one thing we should do rather than worry, and that is: **take it to the Lord in prayer**. Paul does not ask us to deny that we've got problems or to pretend as if they are not there. He urges us rather to face our problems straight, not with worry but with prayer. **Turn worries into prayers**. And say

"Maranatha, Come Lord, Jesus."