

March 1, 2020

Dear Community,

I have been thinking a lot about Fear lately. I brought it into last month's homily, spurred on by something Matthew Fox said in his Daily Meditations (1-15-20). That theme has followed me into Lent. As a therapist I know that when fear takes over the evaluative functions of the brain, our rational abilities go off-line. We believe we are "thinking," but in fact we are desperately seeking safety and that desperation prevents constructive thought. What the brain is actually doing is reacting to perceived danger by doing one of three things. It either sees the object of fear as 1) something to fight; 2) as something to run away from; or 3) as something to brace for by freezing, hoping that "whatever it is" will leave us alone and go away. Over millennia we've learned to do this well. However, when situations and targets are subtly or erroneously introduced into an environment for the purpose of inciting fear, that primitive, protective apparatus at the back of the brain isn't able to differentiate "real" danger from "contrived" threats. It goes on alert, scanning for danger and unable to weigh risks. The "fighters" are aroused and incited. The "flee-ers" start packing, readying to leave. The paralyzed hunker down, unable to move.

We are made of fragile stuff, all of us, and our brains are designed to compensate for this fragility by providing an automatic response system that is always on the alert for danger. This system takes over when the first tiny warning sign reaches our consciousness. It reacts spontaneously, giving no time for thought that could delay our reaction, and it moves us instantly out of the path of disaster. That instinctive reaction keeps us safe when an object is barreling toward us. It is built for survival, and has probably saved our lives at least once. However, it can't distinguish between physical danger and stressors that capture our body's attention on a regular basis. These are the thoughts we classify as "worries" and the anxious or nervous feelings that either trigger those thoughts or are the result of continually thinking them.

At his first inauguration, at the height of the Depression in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke this now famous line: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." As a result of brain studies we now have the science to back up those words. We can't think things through clearly and arrive at solid, promising solutions, when our brains are in a state of fear. It just isn't possible. The cognitive function is "off-line." Think about that. And now look at our nation and the world through that lens. If a growing percentage of us are living in a state of fear, or being kept in a state of fear, what can we expect of a society whose collective cognitive function is shut down? From what source or sources is fear originating? How is it spreading? What are we reading and hearing from others that enhance fear? How are we reacting to the fear being raised and promoted? Who is benefiting, who suffering, from the collective Brain's inability to think rationally? If members of a society are not able to think clearly about their social problems and move toward just and equitable solutions where will Fear take them?

We are in a time when threats, both actual and illusory, are rampant and we must use our imaginations, intuitions, and amazing resourcefulness to deal with them. We can do this only if we, as a people, a society, a global human community are able to use the frontal lobe of our brains, the part that controls emotional expression, problem solving, memory, language, judgment. Real "thinking" can only happen if we Calm Down. Relaxation signals the primitive brain saying "all is clear; you can rest now."

Feeling Calm return to the body, the ever-ready reptilian brain structure simply curls up and goes to sleep. When peaceful energy is restored, the “alert system” goes “off-line.” With the “alert function” deactivated, we are finally able to think rationally and constructively once again. So, how do we relax when there’s so much real, but also trumped-up “scary stuff” going on? Paulo Freire, a Brazilian expert on education says: “The **opposite of love** is...the **fear to love**...” **Love** softens you, **fear** hardens you.” Or, as many believe, “The opposite of fear is love.”

Readings for Liturgies can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

Mass Schedule This Month

Mass in Eugene will be Sunday, **March 8, at First Congregational Church, UCC, 1050 E. 23rd**, at **4:00pm**. A potluck follows our celebration. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish to share. If you are interested in being part of the choir as a musician or singer, please come at 3:00 for rehearsal.

Mass in Portland will be Saturday, **March 14, at Northminster Presbyterian Church, 2823 N. Rosa Parks Way** at **5:00pm**. Please bring an entree, salad or veggie dish for our potluck meal. Choir rehearsal begins at 4:00 and all interested singers and musicians are invited to come and participate.

Upcoming Events:

Lenten Retreat – March 21

Registration forms are available after Masses this month for our annual Lenten Retreat Saturday, March 21, from 10:00 to 5:00, with Mass beginning at 4:00. Stayton Methodist Church welcomes us back for the second year and Trexler Farms will again cater lunch. Bill Zuelke and Val Hornburg, a husband and wife team, will co-facilitate the retreat. Bill is a former Jesuit, a life coach and spiritual director. Val brings her skills as a Soul Collage facilitator, spiritual director and workshop leader. Cost for the retreat is \$50, which includes lunch, and scholarships are available by talking to Toni.

Pastoral Update:

Member Reflection

As I sit in my favorite chair looking out the window watching the birds in the bird feeder. I realize how grateful I am to have these birds with me as I travel thru life. They are a constant reminder to me that we share a planet and life together. When the seed runs out they stand on top of the bird feeder and stare in the window. Their feathers become brighter colors as spring arrives. At times one of them will break into song. Being grateful has become an important part of my life. Even for the small things that most people take for granted or are too busy to notice. But the thing that I am most grateful for is being a part of Sophia Christi and the people who are a part of this wonderful congregation. Each day I make a plan to be grateful for what ever happens and I am often surprised at the outcome. –Carol Zolkoske

Members Corner -- Invitation

Is there something you are willing to share about your journey as a member of Sophia Christi and/or as a reader of this Newsletter? We would love to hear from you! Your

voice, your personal experience, your story of Spirit at work in your life are all part of the ministry of Sophia Christi. Over the past several years members of the Council have shared their reflections here, an example of which you see above. We would love to make this a regular feature in this monthly letter to the community. Simply send your paragraph or any questions you may have to Toni at this email address.

Website

Remember that the newsletter and current homily are posted on the website each month, as are all upcoming Sophia Christi events along with directions to those events. If anyone has skills to offer in maintaining the site, please contact Toni. Our web address is www.sophiachristi.org

A pastoral reminder--if you or someone you know has a pastoral need that isn't being met, please don't hesitate to give me a call. You have my email address in this mailing, and my office phone number is 503-286-3584. Feel free to use either one. You can contact me anytime for conversation, home visitation, reconciliation or anointing, home Masses, weddings, funerals, memorial services or other pastoral care needs.

I realize what I've written above might seem to have nothing at all to do with either the First Sunday of Lent (today) or the Second, Third and Fourth which will cover our Mass in Eugene next Sunday (8th), Mass in Portland the Saturday after that (14th), and our Retreat Mass in Stayton on the 21st. But in fact Lent is a great time to be talking about fear because Fear prevents us from living according to the deepest of Gospel truths—the call to live lives of Love, lives dedicated to learning LOVE's ways by following in the footsteps of a Master-Practitioner. When we fear and judge each other we are out-of-sync with LOVE, the first and only requirement the Gospel lays on us. Throughout Lent Jesus is walking toward Jerusalem. If he was simply intuitive or if he was as attuned to the pulse and pace of his times, the views of his people, the interests of religious authorities and Roman overseers and governors as any astute observer might be—and even if he wasn't Divine—he would have known Jerusalem at Passover was going to be fraught with danger for him, personally, that year. But he kept walking. He didn't give in to fear, a fear he displayed physically when sweat poured off him as he prayed in the garden for “the cup” of suffering to pass him by...”please! Abba. But if this suffering is mine to bear I'm not running away.”

My spiritual practice this Lent is paying attention to my own fear, that knee-jerk reaction that can paralyze, shut-down thinking and movement, or prod me to react with anger or prompt me to look the other way, not pay attention, turn my back and run. I have decided to also look at how fear is used to control, unbalance, disempower, corrupt, paralyze, even incite to violence. All of these disruptions in our lives interrupt our natural discernment abilities, our insights, our inner compass that always points toward harmony and a sense of embedded-ness in the Whole—God—the Wholeness that includes everything and everyone. All these fear-induced disruptions tear at the social fabric as well as the fabric of our souls, separate us from each other and from our very centers, and our Center. Fear begets more fear, more unbalance, more violence. Fear is a disease we contract like a virus. It spreads wildly once unleashed. It preys on human integrity, dignity, solidarity, compassion and uses the energy cells it finds there

to reproduce its own destructive power. Fear is a terrorist, and it is the tactic of terrorism. A family, a society, a nation or world in its grip can only react impulsively; it can't think. Jesus, in Lent, calls us to think, to be honest, to return to our wholeness, to a state of calm, to a place of trust and integrity, by returning to the Gospel of Love: Love in giving; Love in how we see ourselves and our neighbor; Love in praying for each other, the world, our "enemies" and our friends; Love in our speaking; Love in our willingness to truly hear; Love through our eyes; Love in our touch; Love in what, how and with whom we eat. Love thwarts fear. Acceptance and inclusion counter hate. Evan Muller in his blog pureconsciousness.com says: "The opposite of Love is Fear. The opposite of Hate is Acceptance. Every decision we make is rooted in either Love or Fear. Choosing Love isn't easy," he says, "but it will transform your life. Acceptance is the key to creating a life and making choices rooted in Love."

May your Lent be filled with blessings,

Toni