

There isn't one simple act I can share with you which will remove your worry and make your anxiety go away, all I know is that God who made the heavens and the earth wants more than anything else for us to see and realise how almighty and near he is.

Because when we do, it's then that we will see worry in the way that Jesus saw it and how he is able to say 'don't worry', not because it wasn't a part of his own thinking or humanity but because in that moment of complete trust in his Father's ability to make things right, he was able to take his eyes off the situation and onto the throne.

Years ago, in the pioneer days of aviation, a pilot was making a flight around the world. After he had been gone for some two hours, he heard a noise in the plane which he recognised as the gnawing of a rat.

He realized that while his plane had been on the ground the creature had got in. For all he knew it could be gnawing through a vital cable or control of the plane and he became extremely anxious. At first, he didn't know what to do. It was two hours back and more than two hours to the next landing strip.

Then he remembered that the rat isn't made for heights so he began to climb.

He went up a thousand feet, then another thousand and another until he was over 20,000 feet up. The gnawing stopped; the rat was dead for it couldn't survive in the atmosphere so high up. Hours later the pilot brought the plane safely down,

"Lord, I'm frightened right now.... I'm frightened this or that is going to happen, and I don't know what to do or say. I'm frightened I won't have the courage and I'm not sure I can do this. In fact, I can't do this...

A weary Christian lay awake one night trying to hold the world together by his worrying, then he heard the Lord gently say to him, "Now you go to sleep, I'll sit up.

Friends, worry is a rat that will die in the atmosphere of God's presence. So, may we find the courage to leave tomorrow's trouble to tomorrow's strength; tomorrow's work to tomorrow's time; tomorrow's anxiety to tomorrow's grace and to tomorrow's almighty God.

Amen

2nd before Lent 16.2.20 St Mary's Sanderstead & St. James Riddlesdown

Matthew 6:25-end "Do not worry" Fr Grant Cohen

Death was walking toward a city one morning and a man asked, "What are you going to do?" "I'm going to take 100 people today," Death replied. "That's horrible!" the man said. "That's just the way it is," Death said. "That's what I do." The man hurried to warn everyone he could about Death's plan. As evening fell the man saw a newspaper that said 1000 had died that day in the city. Just as he arrived at his home, he met Death again. "You told me you were going to take 100 people," the man said. "Why then did 1,000 die?" "I kept my word," Death responded. "I only took 100 people. Worry took the rest."

The standard sermon on anxiety, and believe me I've sat through some, goes something like this: "It is a sin to worry, and we shouldn't do it... Like that's really going to help anyone!

So, what is worry?

It's defined as this... "To feel or cause to feel anxious or troubled about actual or potential problems"

I wonder if that definition rings true with you this morning? I wonder if you are worrying about something.

*"I can't get through in edgeways,
when my head is full of fear,
Anxiety wreaks havoc
And my other thoughts aren't clear.
The part of me that's strong and sane
Is sitting in a well,
It tries to shout advice to me
I think it's hard to tell
Because it sounds so distant
And its words are all obscure
By the nasty mumbo jumbo
That I'm trying to ignore.
Eventually I break and cave
And anxious thoughts run free.
And when they do, For a short while
I wish I wasn't me..."*

....A poem written by Pookie in her book "Using poetry to promote talking and healing"

I wonder if Pookie's words have ever resonated with you as they have me?

In the book of Deuteronomy (28:66) we read that fear is at the heart of anxiety and worry. "You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life."

I lived those words for the better part of my life, and for the most part I don't even know why.

As in most of our lives things happen which we have no control over. It might be trauma, sadness or issues that we battle with, and without notice, without knowing why, our heart begins to race, we get sweaty palms, our vision goes peculiar, and with an overwhelming sense of fear and doom, we feel as if we're going to die.

When I first began having panic attacks in my early 20's I would ring 999, because I thought I was having a heart attack. They got more and more frequent and I was having them every day. Eventually I was told its 'just a panic attack' it won't kill you.

It may be 'just a panic attack' and knowing it wouldn't kill me was reassuring but it wasn't 'just' a panic attack it's was a very real, very horrible experience that those who have them dread happening again.

Anxiety is something I have learnt to accept as how my mind and body reacts to certain things and experiences, and I have developed ways of dealing with it.

For years I battled with the idea of taking medicine, I would tell myself it was a lack of faith, that I wasn't trusting God enough, after all he could heal me if he wanted...so whenever I heard those words from our gospel reading "Do not to worry" ...I beat myself up because I did, almost all the time.

Not everyone needs citalopram, but irrespective of the severity of our worry, it can often be difficult to discuss how we feel with others, especially if we think that no one else feels the same, that they won't understand, or that they may judge us as weak.

Worry is an epidemic in the world. Some years ago, the Mayo Clinic stated that statistically 80 to 85 percent of their total case load were ill either in reality or artificially due directly to worry and anxiety.

And many experts say that coping with stress is the no 1 health priority of our day, one leading doctor stating that, in his opinion, 70% of all medical patients could cure themselves if only they got rid of their worries and fears. Last year alone, anxiety in the UK accounted for 12.8 million lost days of work, that's 450 lifetimes.

Jesus tells us not to do it...and so I wonder when we hear that, we think that Jesus either didn't get anxious or that he's saying if we do, we fall short?

Because I don't think either is true.

Crucifixion was considered to be the most painful and torturous method of execution ever devised. In fact, so horrific was the pain that a word was invented to help explain it— '*excruciating*', which literally means "from the cross."

A man was struggling to get by because he wasn't able to earn enough for his family, causing him a tremendous amount of anxiety. Someone saw his plight and decided to help him. Now they wanted to remain anonymous so they would just slip an envelope through his door at night.

When he opened it, he found a large sum of money and a note that said "more to follow." This continued for a long time and because of that generosity his worry vanished.

I think Jesus knew exactly what it was like to be anxious. As he knelt in the garden of gethsemane, we read that so great was his anguish that his sweat became as drops of blood. I cannot believe that knowing what awaited him even before the cross, Jesus didn't experience anxiety, he even asked the Father three times that he not go through it...

Anxiety is a natural reaction, to what we call fight or flight so when Jesus says do not worry, what's he saying? What he's not saying is that worry ought not to be a reality to us, but what he is saying is that if God really is God and we believe it, then trust him because as we do he will slip something through the door of our lives with his note telling us 'there's more on the way'.

In July 1992, the Los Angeles Times printed a story on fear of heights which featured an interview with the psychotherapist who heads the Anxiety Disorders Association. He reported that one of his patients was now able to cross the 200-foot-high Bridge in Maryland but only if his wife drove the car and locked him in the boot.

As with any problem we face, the first thing we have to do is recognise and confront it, it's no good pretending that it's not there.

We all worry about different things; my anxiety has 3 main elements. Insecurity or, the sense that something bad is going to happen,

Helplessness, that there's nothing I can do about it, and Isolation, that there's no one to help me.

And to each of these Jesus gives a response, no, it isn't a magic wand that eliminates the feeling but it is something I can use when I feel it.

The writer of book of Hebrews says "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (*Hebrews 4:16*) for we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (*Hebrews 13:6*) "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (*Hebrews 13:5*)

We all experience times of insecurity when we feel helpless and isolated, but we are never truly alone and God knows exactly what happening and is there to help us, and so when anxiety and worry strike, we can do one of 2 things, we can either give in to it, or we can do our best to take it on.