

### **Gospel Reflection: Fifth Sunday of Easter 2020**

“Take from my heart all painful anxiety” is a gospel inspired prayer. It is the prayer of Catherine McAuley, the first Sister of Mercy. Like Jesus, Catherine knew in her being that a troubled heart is an ever present possibility. When we don’t have any serious concerns in the present, we are often anxious about the future. There is a difference, of course, between having concerns and having a troubled heart. The difference lies in how we deal with the inevitable problems and challenges that come our way. If ever there was a time in most of our lives when there are real concerns and potential for troubled hearts, it is right now as we deal with the global Coronavirus pandemic and its impact on so many aspects of life.

Freedom from anxiety is the constant message of the gospels. “Do not let your hearts be troubled” is Jesus’ word to his friends in John’s gospel. The verb, here in passive mood (“be troubled”), is used of Jesus’ spirit when he finds his friend Mary and her companions weeping over the death of Lazarus (11:33). It means literally to shake or to stir up. Jesus is really shaken by grief in that situation. As he faces his own death, he does not want his friends to be troubled of heart or spirit. He speaks here from his own experience.

Jesus shows the way to an untroubled heart: “Believe in God, believe also in me.” The faith of the disciples is to be grounded in his care for them both in the present and into the future: “I go to prepare a place for you... I will come again and will take you to myself”. In this context, Jesus makes three claims: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” The prologue to the gospel, which functions as an overture to the gospel, has introduced the notion of the glorified Jesus as “full of grace and truth” and the bringer of “grace and truth”(1:14, 17). He is the life that is the light of all (1:4), the bread of life, even the resurrection and the life. His claim to be “the way” was foreshadowed in the parable of the gate: “I am the gate for the sheep.”

If the disciples know Jesus, then they also know the way to God whom Jesus images in tender parental terms as “Father”. If Philip does not believe in their mutual indwelling, then maybe he can believe on account of the “works” of Jesus, works that are also the works of God. Those who believe have the power to do these and even greater works. This seems extraordinary, but is really a matter of believing with untroubled hearts that the power comes from God. Let us not underestimate the power of prayer at this time of distress. Praying for those who put their lives at risk to protect others is a powerful means of dealing with troubled hearts.

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