

How to be less troubled in a world like this

Homily for May 13-14

In the Gospel reading for today, Jesus says some words that seem incongruous given their context. Just hours before his crucifixion he says to the Apostles:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

What makes this verse so perplexing is that Jesus says to the Apostles in chapter 12 of John: ***“Now my soul is troubled”***. Then in chapter 13 John comments:

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.”

Then later in chapter 14 Jesus repeats to the Apostles what he had said at the beginning of the chapter:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid

Why is it, that Jesus’ heart is troubled while he encourages the Apostles not to have troubled hearts? I do not have a definitive answer to give but only a speculative sort of consideration. It might be something like a parent’s relationship with a child. There might be a situation where a family is facing a significant burden and the father tries to encourage his children to not trouble themselves, that dad will carry this burden. Jesus is troubled because of the weight of the Cross will befall him. He has to assume the Cross and this troubles his heart. He wants the Apostles to know that this is not a weight they are required to carry. Rather he wants them to know the peace that can be theirs by experiencing the effects of the Cross, which is the peace that comes from believing in God the Father and believing in Jesus.

Let me say something more about this verb “troubled”. It is best translated as “stirred up”. So Jesus is saying “don’t let your hearts be stirred up”.

Picture in your mind a lake that when calm is clear to the bottom. Now picture this same lake when stirred up by a storm, it becomes undulating, that is topsy-turvy and cloudy because of the sediment that is loosened. Jesus, is saying in effect, allow the power of my life and death so effect you that your souls needn’t be like a lake stirred up by the storm but can discover the serenity and clarity of a clear lake on a calm day.

Now of course we know that there are times when life is so difficult that the calm lake analogy just doesn’t seem to work. There are times when our hearts are troubled. But we are invited by Jesus to make a choice, that is directly related to belief in Him. When we have deepening trust in God the Father and God the Son, then the Holy Spirit is able to impart to us that peace which the world cannot give.

Think about this as I relate it to Fatima. Today is the 100th Anniversary of the first apparition the Lady in White made May 13th 1917. At Fatima the three children Francesco, Jacinta and Lucia had 5 more visits from the Lady in White. This resulted in great hardships for the children. There

were of course skeptics aplenty, thinking that the children were delusional or seeking publicity. Lucia mother was one such skeptic. Remember at this time Lucia is only 10. The anti-clerical municipal authorities arrested the children and interrogated them, threatening them with torture by boiling oil and death. They exhibited hearts that were not troubled in the midst of great trials. Jacinta was 7 and Francesco was 8. They had a peace the world could not give them.

Think of another dimension of the Fatima apparitions relating to St. John Paul II who had a particular link to Fatima. He was shot on May 13, 1981 — the liturgical feast day of Our Lady of Fatima — at point-blank range by a professional assassin. He would later comment that “one hand fired the gun, another guided the bullet” — expressing his belief that Mary had saved him from certain death. Hence he went to Fatima on the first and tenth anniversaries of the shooting to give thanks for his life being spared and his ministry continuing. The bullet that was removed from him was added to the Crown of the Fatima statue.

In an article by Father Raymond DeSouza that appeared in the National Post on Thursday he made the following comment about Fatima and St. John Paul II.

“The peaceful defeat of communism was foreseen by no one, that the great evil empire would not only be defeated but dismantled, erased from the map of Europe. Was this not an intervention by God in our time, akin to the great victories won by the children of Israel over their enemies — Moses over Amalek, Joshua at Jericho, David over Goliath?

For those with the eyes of faith, it is easy to see divine providence at work. For those who only see material forces at work in history, first premises exclude that possibility. Consider though a middle case, that of Vaclav Havel, not a Christian believer but a man open to the spirit. The dissident who led the 1989 Velvet Revolution welcomed John Paul to Prague in April 1990 as the first president of a free Czechoslovakia.

“I do not know whether I know what a miracle is,” Havel said. “Nonetheless, I dare say I am party to a miracle now: the messenger of love comes into the country devastated by the ideology of hatred; the living symbol of civilization comes into the country devastated by the rule of the uncivilized. For long decades, spirit has been chased out from our homeland. I have the honour to be a witness to the moment when its soil is being kissed by the apostle of spirituality.”¹

In the homily St. John Paul II gave at the Mass where he began his Petrine Ministry he said these words, words he embodied in how he lived, words the he repeated through his years as the Vicar of Christ.

Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. So often today man does not know what is within him, in the depths of his mind and heart. So often he is uncertain about the meaning of his life on this earth. He is assailed by doubt, a doubt which turns into despair. We ask you

¹ <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/father-raymond-j-de-souza-in-a-skeptical-secular-age-fatima-remains-a-miracle>

*therefore, we beg you with humility and trust, let Christ speak to man. He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life.*²

Notice John Paul makes the connection between skepticism, doubt that leads to despair. What counters such doubt and despair? Opening wide the doors to Christ as we grow in the confidence that belongs to those believe in God and believe also in Jesus.

People who cultivate a life of courageous faith are joined together in a special way. St. Peter describes this union to today's Epistle. We are called to be a people who are built up on the chief cornerstone that is Jesus Christ. When he is the stone that supports us and holds us together we can then be the kind of living stones Peter describes. People who are being brought together as the Church able to live with assurance in the world because we are sure of Jesus. We are sure that as the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life he does bring us to the Father. We are sure that God continues to speak to us in ways that are more contemporary, as he did through Our Lady and the Angel of Peace at Fatima 100 and 101 years ago.

May we be inspired by the example of the Children of Fatima, may we be inspired by the Pope so associated with Fatima to be a people who are choosing the way of trusting in Jesus so that living in a world like this we can hear Jesus say:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me”

² https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html