

Leaning on the Lord's Heart OR what to do in a time of WORRY

Dear Friends of the Heart of Christ,

For my last birthday, I received a card from a long-time college friend that played a symphonic version of *Happy Birthday* as a whirling bear spun to the music. I was amused and fascinated by what the card could do, yet the message inside was of a more sober note. The letter tucked in the envelope from my friend, who has been happily married for over 30 years, with wonderful adult children, lamented that she is still plagued by an old, unrelenting problem—chronic anxiety. And even though her family is, by today's standards, solidly Catholic and stable, still the stresses of living in today's world often put her in panic mode and fearful of what might happen—to her kids, to her finances, to her husband's work and health and to herself. Questions like "what if?" and "should I do?" whirl around her head and keep her fettered to her worries. Even her children—all professionals in their own right—are manifesting that nagging anxiety over their careers and responsibilities.

I wish I had an easy answer to her dilemma and for so many people's similar difficulties who are perpetual worry warts. Because we are vulnerable human beings not meant to live forever on the face of this earth, we're all susceptible to worry. And no matter who you are or where you are (in a monastery or outside of one) we all have experienced times of worry—sometimes intensive worry—when we really don't know what to do next and can't even think straight about how to fix, let alone cope with, our dilemmas.

This is probably why the Church has so appropriately selected for the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus the passage from Luke's (10:41-42) or Matthew's (11:28) Gospel that reads, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." We all need to remind ourselves that those words are meant for each of us—you and me—whether we lived back in Jesus' time or in today's mixed-up world. For all of us who are anxious and burdened by life's cares and concerns, Jesus says to us individually, "Come to me and give me those burdens, problems, heartaches and worries.

A little story in the booklet entitled *When Anxious and Weary* (Abbey Press) expresses how one man dealt with his problem. He writes, "I awoke one morning years ago in a panic, believing I no longer had the strength to carry on. It was a difficult time at work as disagreements with co-workers flared up and major deadlines loomed. I had hurt my back, and for months it had been a constant source of pain throughout the day and kept me from sleeping at night. In that state, I felt abandoned by God and at the end of my rope. Then my daughter, an artist, handed me a shoebox and said, 'This is for you, Dad.' Inside was a statue she'd made of Jesus, seated, looking kind and compassionate. In the box were also a dozen small stones. 'What are the stones for?' I asked. 'They represent your troubles and your worries,' she said. 'Whenever something is bothering you and you can't get free of it, just place your worry in Jesus' lap.' In the midst of my agitation, my daughter had shown me the way: when worries intrude, turn to Jesus."

Perhaps we can take this one step further. Recall the Apostle John's posture at the Last Supper. He's the one who leaned on Jesus' heart. Do you think that his troubles were on his mind in that privileged position? I bet he was resting there and enjoying his Lord knowing that Jesus loved him immensely and would take care of everything. Listen to the sage advice of someone like St. Padre Pio who heard countless troubles in the confessional: "Be of good cheer; abandon yourselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and let him take care of everything!" Or we can heed the advice of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, that consummate contemplative, who puts it this way: "It is such a folly to pass one's time fretting, instead of resting quietly on the Heart of Jesus."

The saints always have words of wisdom to impart to us to guide us through our worrying times. Recently, as I was reading the *Diary* of Saint Faustina I came across some enlightening passages. Here are two of them that I think are very illuminative:

Once I was summoned to the judgment seat of God. I stood alone before the Lord. Jesus appeared such as we know him during his passion. After a moment, his wounds disappeared except for five, those in his hands, his feet and his side. Suddenly I saw the complete condition of my soul as God sees it. I could clearly see all that is displeasing to God. I did not know that even the smallest transgressions will have to be accounted for. What a moment! Who can describe it? To stand before the Thrice-Holy God! Jesus asked me, *Who are You?* I answered, "I am your servant, Lord." *You are guilty of one day of fire in purgatory.* I wanted to throw myself immediately into the flames of purgatory, but Jesus stopped me and said, *Which do you prefer, suffer now for one day in purgatory or for a short while on earth?* I replied, "Jesus, I want to suffer in purgatory, and I want to suffer also the greatest pains on earth, even if it were until the end of the world." Jesus said, *One of the two is enough; you will go back to earth, and there you will suffer much, but not for long; you will accomplish my will and my desires, and a faithful servant of mine will help you to do this.* **Now, rest your head on my bosom—on my heart—and draw from it strength and power for these sufferings because you will find neither relief nor help nor comfort anywhere else...** (Diary #36)

Along with this significant passage, consider this entry made by Faustina which enlarges our understanding of the difficulties we face:

One day, I saw interiorly how much my confessor would have to suffer: friends will desert you while everyone will rise up against you and your physical strength will diminish. I saw you as a bunch of grapes chosen by the Lord and thrown into the press of suffering. Your soul, Father, will at times be filled with doubts about this work and about me. I saw that God himself seemed to be opposing him, and I asked the Lord why He was acting in this way toward him, as though He were placing obstacles in the way of his doing what He himself had asked him to do. And the Lord said, *I am acting thus with him to give testimony that this work is Mine. Tell him not to fear anything; My gaze is on him day and night. There will be as many crowns to form his crown as there will be souls saved by this work.* **It is not for the success of a work, but for the suffering that I give reward.** (Diary #90)

These two citations from the *Diary* of St. Faustina help us understand how to get through life's difficulties and worries according to the mind and heart of Jesus Christ and why the Lord allows us to go through these hardships.

This spiritual perspective of life's adversities is totally absurd to the reasoning of our secular society in which we are all immersed. It is so necessary in order for us to survive spiritually in this arid environment of godless morals and philosophy to keep our eyes focused on the Lord and his messages. The writings of St. Margaret Mary, St. Faustina and the saints will help us form our thoughts and guide our actions according to the Heart of Christ. And good Christian friends will help sustain us in our quest to do the right thing before God. Our thrust must be toward trust in Jesus Christ and not fear of what the world threatens will happen.

Having said all this, I am not oblivious of the manifold concerns and serious dilemmas that people face. Life is complex. And there are no easy answers to some of its tangled problems. But the Sacred Heart of Jesus has the answers. And we do not have to figure them all out by ourselves. Sometimes our dear Lord works by labyrinthic ways, and it is only by hindsight that we see how our difficulties have shaped our spiritual growth and character. A concrete example of this can be taken from the life of our Foundress St. Jane de Chantal. Tragic but providential circumstances forged her destiny and formed her into a real woman of God.

As most of you know, St. Jane de Chantal is one of those unique saints who can be a model for several states of life. Single, married, widowed and finally the co-founder of the Visitation Order with St. Francis de Sales, she has, as the saying goes, "done that, been there." Her mother died shortly after her younger brother was born—she was just a toddler—and her father, president of the Burgundian parliament, raised her with solidly Catholic values. Married at the age of twenty to Baron Christophe de Rabutin-Chantal (about six years older), their life together, spanning nearly nine years, was essentially happy and comfortable. They lived in the countryside where Jane became the chatelaine of a large castle and estate, originally belonging to Christophe's family. For being such a young and inexperienced administrator, she ran the estate with an expertise that paid off the debts and satisfied the servants. Life was going well, and her only real deprivation was the absence of her husband when he was called to court or military action in the King's service. In 1601, the baron finally retired at age 35, partly due to an illness acquired during his last campaign. Jane, now a mother of four small children (one boy and three girls), looked forward to a life of peaceful security as her beloved husband regained his strength under her skillful care. One day in autumn, all this would change. A good friend invited Jane's recuperating husband to take advantage of the fresh air and do some deer-stalking in the nearby woods. Passing through some dense undergrowth, the friend's gun accidentally went off, sending shot into Christophe's thigh. Nine days later, the wound, which had become infected, sent Jane's treasured spouse to the grave. When Jane realized that her husband was dying, she called out in desperation for the Lord to save him. Her biography says that she was in such a state of distress that she ran into the woods frantically calling out to God, "Take all my children, everything, but leave me my husband!" Her profound grief and sense of loss nearly overwhelmed her. But she clung to the Lord and even though her resignation did not lessen her anguish, it helped to turn it into a means of drawing closer to Christ's Heart. Gradually, a longing to do God's will filled her, and she dedicated herself to the care of her children while deepening her spiritual life. Three years later she would meet St. Francis de Sales, and God's designs would begin to unfold for a new religious order. What appeared as tragedy, actually was the stepping-stone to greater graces and God's providential plans.

Our anxious feelings over life's problems and challenges can be hard to cope with, but we can turn to the Lord and ask for his help. We can lean on his Sacred Heart and consciously place our trust in Him. It is our wills and intellects that operate on a higher spiritual plane than our feelings that come and go. When we intentionally give ourselves over to the Sacred Heart, his love and care will not fail us. +

This talk on Sacred Heart Spirituality was given in our Gathering Room on August 13th, 2017. If you would like to attend similar presentations by the sisters, our next talk will be held on Sunday, October 1st, 2017 at 4:00 p.m.