

Deliver us, Lord, from all Distress

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Ecc. 1:2; 2:21-23 / Col 3:1-5, 9-11 / Lk 12:13-21
Ave Maria Catholic Church, July 31, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

The readings of this Sunday’s liturgy direct our attention to the anxieties that we experience in the world. Anxiety is a feeling of worry and uneasiness. It is a sense of unrest that we try to avoid. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul, with compassion, says: *“I want you to be free from anxieties,”* (1 Corinthians 7:32).

Our need for deliverance from anxieties is so compelling that it is even included in our prayer during Holy Mass as we say during the communion rite: *“Deliver us, Lord, we pray, from every evil, graciously grant peace in our days, that, by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress.”*

We experience distress. We experience anxiety. We are anxious about things we might lose. We are anxious because we love them and reject the idea of not having them. Therefore, anxieties become a perfect test of our hearts. Let us examine our anxieties, let us discover where they are, and we will also find where our hearts are.

Naturally, we feel anxiety about losing health and life, when the good of family and friends is at risk, when our reputation is compromised, or when professional or academic achievements may not be reached. We feel anxiety about the food we might eat and the clothing we might use.

But again, anxieties reveal our hearts, and our hearts must be in order. What exactly is the order we must have? This is the order: *To love God first, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. And then, everyone and everything else, for God’s sake.*

Sometimes, we make a world of little things. Things that sooner or later will pass away like the world itself. We jump, scream, lose patience and control, and forget the most essential and the most evident rule of life. Today’s first reading reminds us of that rule:

“Vanity of vanities, says Qoheleth, vanity of vanities! . . . For what profit comes to man from all the toil and anxiety of heart with which he has labored under the sun? All his days, sorrow and grief are his occupation; even at night, his mind is not at rest. This also is vanity,” (Ecc. 1:2. 2:22-23).

If our hearts were in order, we would treasure the most important and fundamental rule that Jesus himself teaches: *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?”* (Matthew 16:26)

Worldly anxieties lead to foolishness.

Foolishness is not the same as ignorance. A person in good faith might not know something. A person in good conscience could say: *“I am sorry, I did not know that. If I did, I would never have done this, or said that.”* However, foolishness is different. Foolishness is a voluntary decision. The foolish person knows the facts, but chooses something contrary to the facts, and he becomes a fool.

In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul describes this act of foolishness. Saint Paul denounces those who deny the evident existence of God in the work of creation. He also indicates the punishment for this sin: *“While claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man, or of birds, or of four-legged animals, or of snakes,”* (Rom. 1, 23).

That was the foolishness of the people of Israel. After experiencing the seven plagues that God inflicted on the Egyptians, after crossing the Red Sea with walls of water to their right and left, after receiving food from heaven, they made a molten calf with the bit of gold they had and said: *“This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt,”* (Ex. 32: 4).

They were anxious because Moses was not coming down from the mountain. Then, they were foolish for putting their trust in a piece of gold.

Are we surprised by the action of the Israelites? We should take a moment to examine ourselves. What are our anxieties, and which anxieties are our golden calves? We may not deny God in theory, but what about in practice? Are our actions consistent with what we believe?

The parable of the foolish rich man whose land produced a great harvest speaks for itself (Lk 12: 16–21). The rich man (rich in his own eyes but not in God’s eyes) was proud of his harvest and put all his trust in his harvest. Then, he said to himself: *“Now as for you, you have so many good things stored up for many years; rest, eat, drink, be merry!”*

God’s words are clear: *“You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?’ Thus, will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God.”*

Let us be wise!

The second book of Chronicles tells us that *“God appeared to Solomon and said to him: Whatever you ask, I will give you”* (2 Chronicles 1:7).

Let us pause for a moment. Let us try to put ourselves in Solomon's place and let us give our answer. What would our petition be?! Would it be health and long life, riches and honors, and the defeat of our enemies? Solomon answered: "*Give me wisdom and knowledge,*" (2 Chronicles 1:10).

How can we be truly wise and rich in what matters to God?

Saint Paul answers this question in today's second reading, the letter to the Colossians:

First, unroot from your life what displeases God: "*Put to death the parts of you that are earthly: immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry. Stop lying to one another,*" (Col 3: 9-11).

Second, seek what is holy: "*If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth,*" (Col 3:1-3).

We naturally suffer anxieties. That is part of our human condition here on earth. However, if we want to be free from them, we must not be foolish but wise. We must put aside everything that separates us from God and seek what is above!

Today, we renew our petition: *Deliver us, Lord, from all distress and grant us peace! Amen.*