



6th Week of Easter: 22nd/23rd May 2022
Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“A peace the world cannot give.”

One of the issues that came to the fore in the time of COVID was “mental health”. Like “Dementia” it can be a subject that is kept hidden because of the embarrassment of admitting vulnerability in this area. However, in the time of “lockdown” it has been spoken of as more people have been depressed and anxious. Already, it had become almost “fashionable” to speak of mental health at all ages because “celebrities” had spoken of being anxious or suffering from eating disorders at one time or another during life.

It is good to see more openness about a health issue like this, especially if it can lead to better ways of dealing with it in the Community and Medically. One of the remedies that is spoken of is ‘mindfulness’. I have not explored it personally, but I have read about it and that has led to my thinking it should be approached with care: basically, as practiced in the Western World, it seems to be a secular technique that is relativist and lacking a moral foundation. An article in the Guardian Newspaper describes it as self-serving and ego enhancing technique aiming to reduce stress; it comforts and numbs. On the other hand, it says anything that boosts your motivation to do things could prove effective in trying to manage mental health, depression, or anxiety episodes. Another article (and this is from a secular Newspaper) says “finding ways to encourage people to get to the feeling of ‘I can be a different person’ is really important”. When I read these comments I thought this all points towards the Christian pattern of life, particularly reaching out to others in love. I wondered does the Christian Faith contribute towards mental wellbeing. While the value of Christian belief has often been seen negatively in the past by the scientific community, it is interesting to see how contemporary research is much more positive. A well-regarded report by Harold Koenig entitled “Religion, Spirituality and Health” says “religion provides resources for coping with stress that may increase the frequency of positive emotions and reduce the likelihood that stress will result in emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety disorder, suicide and substance abuse. Religious coping resources include powerful cognitions (strongly held beliefs) that give meaning to difficult life circumstances and provide a sense of purpose...religious beliefs have the potential to influence the cognitive appraisal of negative life events in a way that makes them less distressing.”

The Gospel for the Sixth Sunday of Easter points to the peace that is offered by letting Jesus into our lives. Jesus says: “Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid...Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you, a peace the world cannot give, this is my gift to you.” This portion of St John’s Gospel comes near the end of Jesus’ farewell discourse at the Last Supper; it points to a future shaped by love not fear. Though Jesus is returning to His Father, the disciples will not be alone, as He is sending His Holy Spirit, through whom He will remain with them. Patrick Van der Vorst in an article

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commenting on an allegorical painting by Corrado Gianquinto depicting Justice and Peace, reflecting on this part of Chapter 14 of St John says “Peace for Jesus (and His gift to us) is something much....deeper: it is not something temporal and external...it is eternal and internal.”

We live in the light of the Resurrection of Jesus: when we meet Him it changes our whole life, as it did for St Paul thrown of His horse on the way to persecute the Christian Community in Damascus. The worries and mental anguish of life today have to be dealt with by all means available to us through the health service and so on, but beyond that our Catholic Faith envelops all in a life of trust and hope in a higher order with us now, and reaching fulfilment in what is described in the vision of St John in the Book of the Apocalypse as “the holy city coming down from God out of heaven.”

There is a famous quote from St Pio of Pietrelcina: “Pray, Hope and Don’t Worry”. Jesus has given us a “Peace the world cannot give”.

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