

**August 2, 2020 Separation Anxiety Homily:** Surely one of the most respected and influential figures of this past century, the Twentieth, was an Austrian Psychiatrist named Sigmund Freud. He was a distinguished man of science and a pioneer in the field of psychoanalysis. Regrettably, he was an atheist and often showed marked hostility to people of religious faith in his writings and lectures. Freud introduced to the world his theory of "Separation Anxiety". He maintained that one of man's greatest fears is to be separated for an indefinite period of time or even permanently from family and friends. To be separated from someone we care deeply about can leave us feeling alone, isolated, helpless and fearful. Freud speculates that the trauma of separation begins very early in life. Every time a child is left alone it soon panics and cries out for its mother. All of us, men and women alike, experience the pain of separation and simultaneously long for a restoration of the original sense of union.

Consider a young man going off to war or a young woman abandoning the world and entering a community of cloistered nuns. Separation can indeed be painful for the families.

The eighth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans has been considered by biblical scholars to be a triumphant hymn to the love of God that is manifest in Christ Jesus. Twice in today's reading (Rom. 8: 35-39) St. Paul makes reference to separation. He asks: "What will separate us from the love of Christ?" His short answer is, "nothing". He enumerates the hardships and trials we are likely to face in the course of our pilgrimage in life. They are anguish, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and the sword. If Paul speaks with passionate intensity, it is only because he speaks from personal experience. Paul's reassuring words are to encourage us. "All these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us." (Rom. 8:37)

Paul tackles the most fearsome enemy of all, which is death. In his slim volume, "Preaching Paul", scripture scholar Frank Matera, reflects on Paul's musings on our most dreaded enemy. He writes, "The most fearsome aspect of death is not the act of dying but the fear of being forever separated from those we love. We no longer see their faces. We no longer hear their voices. We no longer touch them again."

Recall the Beloved disciple, possibly the apostle John, resting his head on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. His greatest fear was to be separated from his beloved Master.

As Christians, we believe that Christ has overcome our death by his life, death and resurrection

Shortly after my ordination to the priesthood, my father asked if I would kindly pay one of his clients, a recently widowed man named Andrew, a visit. I complied with my father's request. So one day the two of us visited the sweet old man. After a lovely conversation, he asked me to accompany him to his kitchen. Gladly I did so. In the kitchen I could not fail to notice that the table had been set for two people. Since he informed me that he lived alone, I asked him the identity of his table companion. He replied, "My wife. I speak to her at every meal." My initial reaction was that he might be a little crazy. But then I recalled the words of Paul, "Not even death can separate us from the love of Christ Jesus our Lord". Our bond with our loved one does not end at death.

In Christ's love, the disciple will find the necessary strength to face every danger and trial. That was true of Jesus as well. On the Cross he was not separated from the Father's love.

If you are of a certain age, you may recall a popular, chart-topping, song recorded by the female recording artist, Pat Benatar, "Hit Me With Your Best Shot". The words speak of a supremely confident boxer who taunts his opponent in the ring. He may take many body blows in the contest, and even fall to the canvas more than once. But he cannot be defeated. At the end of the fight he will still be standing erect. Here are just a few of the song's words. "You come on with it. Come on. You don't fight fair. But that's O.K., see if I care. Knock me down, it's all in vain. I get right back on my feet again."

Christians can expect to absorb many body blows at the hands of their enemies. But whatever they do to them it will not make a difference. In Christ we are indestructible. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

In Christ Jesus, God has given us everything and in the future nothing can separate us from God.  
Nothing!

At the end of each day, let us each embrace the words of Pat Benatar's pugnacious and daring song: "Hit me with your best shot. Fire away." As disciples of Jesus we can absorb all the blows!

Amen!