

### **Week 3: Anxious For Nothing - Prayer**

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I will never forget New Year's Day 1981. My family had returned home around 1:00 a.m., and went straight to bed only to be awakened around 3:00 a.m. by what sounded like a freight train derailment in our yard. All eight of us ran out the back door to discover a car lying upside down in our side yard, inches from our house. The young woman who had been driving the car was stumbling around the yard, mumbling something to herself. My parents, who approached the woman to make sure she was OK, were almost knocked over by the smell of Peppermint Schnapps on the woman's breath. The police eventually came, and arrested the young woman, and then called her parents to come pick her up.

For the next three weeks, I was afraid to go to sleep. I laid in bed each night, staring at the ceiling imagining what would have happened if the car had not been slowed by a small tree, our dog house and a cement statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary which, although it was directly in the path of the car, only lost a hand. I was certain that the car would have driven into our house, blocking the basement stairway, our only exit from the

basement. After about three weeks of sleepless nights, I got up one night around 10:00 to talk to my mom. As I approached the living room, where my Mom was laying on the couch, I noticed a rosary in her hands. When my brothers and sisters heard us talking, they too got up and joined us. I quickly learned that I was not the only one having trouble sleeping. So, my Mom listened as each of us explained how we were feeling anxious and scared. She then reassured us that it would be OK, and then we prayed together. Afterwards, my Mom sent us to bed, but told us to continue to pray that God would protect our family, and to then trust that He would. For several years after that night, I remember seeing my Mom praying her Rosary as I walked by the living room.

As I was preparing this homily, I called my Mom to check my memory of what had happened that night. She shared with me that her first prayers that night were prayers of thanksgiving, thanking God that no one was hurt. To this day, she is convinced that God was watching over our family that night. But, she also told me that, like us kids, she also was very anxious during this time, and that the only way she was able to get through the anxiety was by praying.

**Screen:** "Anxious for Nothing" (series slide)

This is week three of our series, “Anxious for Nothing.” The series is based on a book of the same name by Max Lucado. In the book, Lucado reflects on Philippians chapter 4, verses 4-8. (READ TEXT)

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**“Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice! Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”**

In these verses, St. Paul gives a step by step formula for how we can, by following St. Paul’s guidance, truly become “anxious for nothing.”

In week one of the series, Fr. Mike reflected on St. Paul’s first step: “Rejoice,” and talked about how, in order to be truly “anxious for nothing,” followers of Jesus first and foremost must choose to be people of joy; to “Rejoice!”

Last week, Fr. Mike reflected on St. Paul’s second step: “Contagious Calm,” and spoke of the importance of knowing and really believing that God is always with us and that nothing can keep him away from us. If we truly know and believe this, our anxiety will melt away and the peace and

calm that we feel will become contagious to others through our love and through our kindness.

**Screen:**

**“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”**

This week, we are reflecting on step three: “Prayer” -- In Phillipians, St. Paul tells us, ***“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”***

God wants to be in a relationship with us; he wants us to come to him when we feel anxious. He wants to take that anxiety away, and he wants us to have the peace and calm that Fr. Mike spoke of last week.

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We have many reasons to be anxious these days. I don't need to remind you that we are in a pandemic, the economy is in the gutter, we continue to experience social and racial unrest, and we are politically divided -- so much so that even within families, brothers and sisters cannot be civil to each other. If we do not agree about something, we cannot just agree to disagree. Instead, some of us demonize those who do not agree with them, call them evil, and cut them off from love and affection. So, on

top of the already existing separation, loneliness, isolation, and lack of human connection caused by the pandemic, this “demonization” causes even more separation. All of this increases our stress and increases our anxiety. So where do we turn?

In today’s Gospel, the Pharisees present Jesus with a dilemma which they believe he cannot escape. In their calculation, he will either have to denounce the Roman authorities or denounce God. But, Jesus knows another way. When they ask Jesus if it is lawful to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, Jesus simply tells them that people should give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, but give to God what is God’s. So, if we follow Jesus’s instruction from today’s Gospel, the question for each of us is: *“What in your life belongs to Caesar and what in your life belongs to God?”*

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The last time I preached on this Gospel several years ago, I remember noting that just as the Roman coin is inscribed with the image of Caesar and, as Jesus noted in today's Gospel, therefore belonged to Caesar, **we** are each inscribed/**created** in the image and likeness of God. So, just as the Roman coins were the currency of the Roman Empire, **we** are the currency of God's kingdom. **We** belong to God. Our hearts, minds, souls, spirits and lives all belong to **him**. And, so if we follow Jesus's instruction to give God what is God's, as Jesus says in today's Gospel, then we must each give God our very selves. That includes our fears, our hurts, and our anxieties.

Screen:

**“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”**

St. Paul knew this, and that is why he wrote to the Phillipians: *“Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”*

God wants us to come to him, to talk to him, to ask him for help when we are feeling anxious and afraid. He alone can bring us peace. But, in this

verse, St. Paul tells us we must come “with thanksgiving,” just like my Mom did the night of the car accident.

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Last March, just as the pandemic was spreading, I got a sore throat which seemed to linger. By the third day, I was concerned. I had driven to Connecticut and to New York to pick up my daughters from college and the sore throat developed exactly **five days** after my trip. I was worried I had caught the virus. My doctor sent me to get tested, and **I** started to pray...**a lot**. I prayed morning and evening prayer, several times during the day, and the rosary each night. After a few days, the test came back negative. I was soooo relieved. I immediately dropped to my knees and thanked God. For the next few days, I kept up the prayer routine, thanking God several times a day that I did not have Covid, and praying for those who did. But, gradually, over time, I prayed less -- first, only four or five times a day, and eventually, after a couple weeks, I was back to just morning and evening prayer, (and, of course, praying the parish’s Covid prayer at 4:00pm.)

Now, I suspect that most of you are like me, and pray to God more when you need something. God is OK with that. He wants us to pray to him whenever and however we can. But, what he truly wants is a relationship.

And, running to Him only when we need something is not a relationship. In Phillipians, St. Paul says that “**in everything**” we should pray. So, how do we translate St. Paul’s instruction to pray to God “in everything?”

Well, we can start by praying spontaneously, starting a regular dialogue with God, stopping to thank God when he blesses us, not just when we need something. We can, by doing this, establish a rhythm of prayer in our lives.

Screen:

**P**

**R**

**A**

**Y**

When I was in formation for the diaconate, I learned a simple acronym: **P.R.A.Y.**, to help me to pray spontaneously:

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**Praise**

**Repent**

**Ask**



## You

-First, **“P” Praise** - Begin by addressing God as “God” or “Father” or whatever name you use for your own intimate relationship with him, and then offer praise and thanks to him for all the many blessings he has given you. You can be general, or you can be specific.

-Second, **“R” Repent** - Repent for your sins and ask God’s forgiveness. You can be specific and name your sins, or you can be general.

-Third, **“A” Ask** - Ask God for what you need at that moment in order to find peace and calm. Maybe it is simply perspective; maybe you need to ask him to be with you as you take a test, go to a job interview; do the dishes; or, prepare dinner for your family. Maybe you want to ask him to help relieve your anxiety.

-Last, **“Y” You** - We always end our prayer, “In the name of your son, Jesus.”

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So, I'd like to end my homily with a prayer, using this formula:

**Praise...**Let us Pray. Dear God, we praise and thank you for all that you do for us each and every day, and we remember the great and many gifts you have given us -- including your son Jesus; and, your apostle Paul, who taught the Phillippians (and us) how to be “anxious for nothing” by putting our faith and trust in you.

**Repent...**We know that we often fail, and fall short of loving you the way we should. We ask your forgiveness, and we ask you to give us the strength to do better.

**Ask...**We ask you now [this evening (morning)] to watch over us, to take away or at least diminish the anxiety that **we** are feeling in this difficult and challenging time in our nation and in our world. We ask that you bless and watch over those who are suffering from Covid, those suffering from racial injustice, from mental illness. We ask you to heal divisions in our families, in our communities, in our nation and in our world. And, last, we ask that you bring us the peace that only you can give and help us to truly be “anxious for nothing.”

**You...**We pray all of this in the name of your son, Jesus. Amen