

Daily Office Devotional, Wednesday, May 12, 2021
The week of the sixth Sunday after Easter
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Eve of the Ascension

Daily Office Lectionary Readings

AM Psalm 119:97-120

Baruch 3:24-37; James 5:13-18; Luke 12:22-31

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *Book of Common Prayer*

Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*

Compline (Night Prayer), Page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*

Daily Office Gospel, Luke 12:22-31

22 He said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? 27Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 28But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

David's Reflections

Rollo May refers to anxiety as ". . . this nameless and formless uneasiness that has dogged the steps of modern man." * In these verses (paralleled in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6), Jesus cautions us not simply about anxiety as an emotional state but about an anxious striving and preoccupation. Some anxiety is essential to healthy living. A student not anxious about an exam will prepare poorly. A parent not anxious about a crying baby will be irresponsible. But, anxious striving arising out that nameless and formless uneasiness takes anxiety to another level.

In her profound work, *Witness to the Fire: Creativity and the Veil of Addiction*, Linda Leonard argues that humans are dogged by anxiety because of the tension between our God-given potential and our human frailty and limitations. She argues that addiction has been one way of numbing out the anxiety. Her thought seems indebted to Kierkegaard, who said, "The self is a synthesis in which the finite is the limiting factor, and the infinite is the expanding factor."+ Or, as Reinhold Niebuhr said: "Man may, in the same moment, be anxious because he has not become what he ought to be; and also anxious lest he cease to be at all #

One could be filled with anxiety and not recognize it as a profound issue, because it always has been there and we have not understand how pervasive it was. It can dog our steps so consistently that we no longer recognize its distinctive bark.

What are we to do? We can assume from Jesus' teaching on the subject that he was well acquainted with anxiety. Here he normalizes it as a part of the human condition. His teaching in this text assumes anxiety as endemic in our experience. As his followers, Jesus gives us the freedom to practice a radical emotional honesty by naming our anxiety, admitting its presence. Then, we can begin to ask questions about what is creating the anxiety. We may have to have the assistance of a counselor to get at it.

Jesus' strategies in this text include an invitation to radical trust in God's goodness. God values us more than the birds and the wild flowers, which God provides for. Won't God provide for us, too? As part of that faith, we can disidentify and detach from our possessions. As Jesus says in verse 23, our life is more than food and our body more than clothing. If we begin taking that step, the prospect of losing our stuff will have less power to haunt us.

Jesus also encourages us to take our anxieties to God, naming them in prayer. God cares for us and we can trust God to ease our anxieties. God will be good to us even though our anxieties may reveal our lack of faith. Some of them may persist, which will require us to keep persisting with God. One thing for certain. If we medicate those anxieties with addiction, they will continue to dog us and the addictions will make us less fully alive, because we will not be experiencing our emotions.

Jesus cares about us and offers us ways to counter the plague of that "namless and formless uneasiness" that has dogged our steps. May you be wrapped in God's peace this day.

* Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1977), p. x.
 +Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. with introduction and notes by Walter Lowrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), p. 163.
 # Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1, (New York: Scribner's, 1941), pp. 196f.

Collect of the Day, The Sixth Sunday of Easter

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 225)

Collect of the Weekdays of Easter

Almighty God, you show the light of your truth to those who are in error, to the intent that they may return to the way of righteousness: Grant to those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to it; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Collect for Grace

Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 100)

For the Diocese

O God, by your grace you have called us in this Diocese to a goodly fellowship of faith. Bless our Bishop(s) Peter and David, our Bishop Coadjutor, Shannon, David, our priest, and other clergy, and all our people. Grant that your Word may be truly preached and truly heard, your Sacraments faithfully administered and faithfully received. By your Spirit, fashion our lives according to the example of your Son, and grant that we may show the power of your love to all among whom we live; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 817)

A Prayer for Light

O Lord God Almighty, as you have taught us to call the evening, the morning, and the noonday one day; and have made the sun to know its going down: Dispel the

darkness of our hearts, that by your brightness we may know you to be the true God and eternal light, living and reigning for ever and ever. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission

Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. *Amen.* (BCP, 101)