

Dear Parishioners,

I heard an absolutely stunning quote today that is worth pondering, "***The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is anxiety.***" Please indulge me as I ponder this statement with you because the truth of this adage is so simple, yet powerful.

The opposite of faith is not doubt. It is possible to have faith and still be in doubt. The mysteries of our faith are so far beyond what our minds can grasp it is natural for us to be in doubt at times. That does not necessarily mean we do not have faith. I think of St. Thomas the Apostle who was so full of doubt that he found it impossible to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead even when the ten other apostles tried for a week to convince him that it was true. In his stubbornness he refused to believe, but that doesn't necessarily mean he didn't have faith. Faith and belief are two different things. Faith is the gift that enables us to believe even when we cannot fully understand the mysteries of our relationship with God. Once Thomas was able to see that Jesus had indeed been raised from the dead it was his faith that enabled him to say that Jesus is, "My Lord and my God."

There are times in our lives when we are filled with doubt. We are not always certain about our journey through this life, we do not know where we are going, we do not always understand the reasons why life is the way it is; and sometimes it seems there are far more questions than answers. But still we strive to be people of faith, called to do the best we can to love and serve the Lord as his disciples.

The opposite of faith is anxiety. That word "anxiety" might seem out of place, but it is true on many levels. When I think of anxiety being the opposite of faith, I don't think of the nervousness a person might feel when asked to get up and speak in front of a large group of people. That is not an easy thing to do; but we usually find it is our faith that gets us through that nervousness and, therefore, enables us to get the message across. When I think of anxiety being the opposite of faith, I think of the anxiety that convinces us there is no reason to have faith; the anxiety that tells us there is nothing sacred in this world, and therefore nothing to believe in. This is the anxiety that leads to the deep, dark, depths of spiritual despair. This is the anxiety that convinces couples with unwanted pregnancies to seek the

easiest possible answers even when that means murder. This is the anxiety that tells us the quality of a person's life is so diminished she deserves to "die with dignity," and so euthanasia becomes an option for the relief of suffering. Anxiety causes us to believe that someone who has committed a horrific act of violence, or murder deserves to die because his execution will bring about "closure." Anxiety is the opposite of faith and it has the potential to bring about death.

People who truly have the gift of faith are given the serenity to believe that God will send the Holy Spirit ~ the Lord, the giver of life ~ who will always lead us through even the most difficult times of grief from loss or the most tragic events of this life.

A Mennonite man was interviewed by a CNN journalist the day after the children were murdered in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; and he spoke softly of the need to forgive the man who did this and then took his own life. This Mennonite man spoke of the importance of praying for the families of the children who died and for the family of the man who acted from such a deep despair ~ an anxiety that destroyed so much life in such a small community.

What we have to remember is that we all have been given the gift of faith in abundance far greater than doubt or anxiety. Neither doubt nor anxiety has the power to eliminate faith; but they can make us so weak as to render us unable to act on faith. Faith gives us the power, the grace, the calm serenity to surrender our lives to God ~ who heals all doubt, who blesses us with peace.

This was the message Christ spoke to the Apostles that first night he met them in that upper room of doubt, anxiety, and despair, "Peace be with you." And then he breathed his spirit on them and they were filled with joy.

In joyful hope,

Fr. Tim Seigel