

Easter 7, '11  
Twente

Acts 1:6-14  
1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11  
John 17:1-11

### **Cast your worries on the Lord**

If you have worked in any business organization or educational institution, especially where good cooperation is essential to achieve goals, the odds are pretty good that at some point, you may have had to take personality indicator test. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator or the Keirsey Temperament Sorter or Enneagram or ones based on Carl Jung's theories on character.

One of the rare ones with a sense of humour is the '100 Acre Personality Test' based on the assumption that most of us are like at least one of the characters in AA Milne's children's classic *Winnie the Pooh*.

Are you friendly, simple and easy-going like Pooh? Are you so orderly as to get frustrated when things aren't, like Rabbit? Are you clever but a bit full of yourself, like Owl? Are you carefree and energetic (but chaotic) like Tigger? Or are you pessimistic and glum like Eeyore? Or are you timid and anxious like Piglet?

I suspect that many of us have elements of each of the characters (and more besides) in us. But it's probable that many of us can identify to some extent with Piglet, who worries a lot.

Many of us have worries that preoccupy us. Some psychiatrists suggest that worry is not all bad, some is positive. Psychiatrist Dr Edward Hallowell argues: 'Toxic worry is when the worry paralyzes you,' whereas 'Good worry leads to constructive action.'

But worrying is seldom enjoyable, just ask Piglet. But one thing that works for Piglet and most others is being around others who help us overcome our worries. Piglet finds that especially with Pooh's support, he does not worry as much.

Worry can be debilitating, no doubt about it. Some of us worry so much that we sometimes forget exactly what it was that set us to worrying. And one of the worst aspects of worrying is that it prevents us from seeing the way out, from seeing God's plan, from grasping the help and using the support available to us.

The Christians who received St Peter's first letter where about to face persecution for their faith. St Peter does not in any way belittle their situation. He recognizes the fears they have about what is ahead of them. But points them to what they need.

He says, in chapter 5, <sup>6</sup> 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. <sup>7</sup>Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.'

Cast your worries on the Lord. The word that St Peter uses – 'cast' – is an active verb. It is about making a choice to dispose of something useless and unhelpful. Giving completely over to God who is greater than whatever it is. It is actively giving up something and actively accepting God's love in its place, a love that is overwhelming and life-giving.

There is a folk tradition in Peru that captures this giving away of anxiety to God. Some Peruvians have special knitted pouches of little dolls, no more than 2 cm high, that are essentially just little cross shaped stick figures in colourful native dress. Whenever a person has a worry, they take a doll out, give the worry to the doll, and put it in a box with a lid. The doll stays there until after there has been time to pray, time for healing and preparation, time to be stronger, time to be open to what God might reveal for the situation. It's a wonderful illustration of a way to put away ones worries so as not to give them more power than they deserve, to give them over to God.

Handling worry is a different thing than handling suffering. St Peter is writing to Christians who are worried about suffering that is to come. He invites them to cast their worries on God, but also to try to remain strong, to resist temptation, and persevere so that eventually, 5:<sup>10</sup> 'the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. <sup>11</sup>To him be the power for ever and ever.'

Throughout his letter, St Peter has tried carefully to distinguish between types of suffering and between what can be gained from it. No one in their right-mind should enjoy suffering or want to inflict it on another. But St Peter points out that there is a difference between totally undeserved suffering, and the suffering that one receives for wrongdoing. The latter may be justified, but undeserved suffering can never be justified.

Even so, St Peter and other Christians have discovered what we can learn from undeserved suffering:

1. Suffering can help us identify with Christ who was innocent and suffered for us. Christ also proved by his suffering that suffering in itself is not God's negative judgment on anyone. Christ was God's beloved, yet suffered.
2. Suffering can also help us have more sympathy and understanding for others who suffer.
3. Suffering can teach us about ourselves and what is important to us. St Peter tells his friends, 'Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you.' Suffering tests our metal, in a fiery furnace, but can help us learn truths about life and love.
4. Suffering can help us witness to Christ, the Suffering Servant who is our Saviour, and find in him our salvation.

Suffering is a fact of existence in our world. The spiritual question suffering poses is, will we rely on God to get us through or not?

Julian of Norwich, whom I mentioned last week in this respect, lived in a time of catastrophe. The Black Death hit England in 1349 and recurred with devastating effect over the next 100 years. We do not know for sure, but this pandemic probably killed about half the population of Europe. In 1373 Julian fell seriously ill and nearly died. One of the strange fruits of her experience were visions that revealed God's love to her and His desire to save all humanity. It was she who said, in spite of everything, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' This is to cast our worries on God. Amen.