Stressed Out
5th Sunday of Easter
http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/051417.cfm
Acts 6:1-7
1 Peter 2:4-9
John 14:1-12

Stress! On May 1, USA TODAY headlined that Americans are breaking records for being stressed. What is happening to us? Americans have a long history of being resilient, strong, free, and brave. Our history is filled with a vast array of experiences and events that should have led to record-breaking periods of stress. Two World Wars, threats of nuclear war, riots, assassinations, 9/11, just to name a few. But 2017 is the record-breaking year. Again, what is happening to us?

According to psychologist Melanie Greenberg, author of The Stress-Proof Brain, “Changing the way you think about stressors can eliminate this phenomenon.” So, it isn’t our fast-paced life, our political turmoil, the world threats that are causing stress, but our reaction to these stressors that has caused the American Psychological Association’s new evaluation.

Melanie Greenberg’s book outlines five steps that can lower one’s reaction to today’s stressors. Reading through them, there is a sense of familiarity. There are echoes of Thich Nhat Hanh’s writing, of Thomas Keating’s and Henry Nouwen’s, and many more of our spiritual writers. In fact, the key to keeping stress at bay, of not letting those stressors be the constant zinging of mosquitoes in our minds—that key is spoken by Jesus himself in our Gospel reading: “Do not let your hearts be troubled!” He continues, “You have faith in God; have faith also in me.”

In praying about this Gospel an image came to me. Recently, I was on a United Airlines flight coming into Chicago. We had been flying above the clouds with glorious sunshine filling the brilliant blue spring sky. The plane began descending into thick, gray clouds—and they were really thick, almost like dirty cotton batting. I knew Chicago was beneath us, but surely couldn’t see it. I also knew the pilots were probably being guided by both instruments and the control tower. My tremors of fear were calmed as I placed my trust and faith in the pilots, their expertise, and sources of guidance.

Jesus tells us to have faith in God and himself. If I can trust pilots and instruments and control towers, can I not trust the God of the universe? Trust the human Jesus who also knew fear and doubt and worry? The divine Jesus who said, “I am the way and the truth and the life”? My prayer continued with the thought that God is my control tower, my GPS. Oftentimes God’s voice is so gentle, I can barely hear it. But I need to listen and calmly follow the directions even if I see nothing but cotton batting clouds all around.
I thought my reflection on that Gospel was finished, but then, the next day God added that I have another task. I have to set the destination on my GPS. Those of us who are challenged by technology can struggle with that job. I once realized that I had to clear a previous destination or I would be driving right back where I started from. Could that be a similar situation in my spiritual GPS?

Recently, Sister Melannie Svoboda spoke locally and mentioned that most commercials are about control—control of our appearance, our health, our living situation, our choices of food and drink, etc. Could it be that the destination that’s currently set on my spiritual GPS is about control, too? Even control of the direction and style of my spiritual life? If I choose God as the destination and the directing voice, I may have to let go of and replace those “controls.”

God added another lesson in my prayer on Good Shepherd Sunday. The voice of my spiritual GPS is not a disembodied, objective voice, but that of a loving, caring God, the voice of the Shepherd who knew me before I was born and will care for me into all eternity. The One who willingly died to save me from the wolves that surround me in this weary world of ours is gently saying, “Go this way, and now this way.”

The next time I program my GPS, may I remember these lessons. May I listen to that gentle voice guiding me on my way. As that occurs, I believe that I will surely react to the stressors of the road with more calm. Hopefully, that will then remind me of my spiritual GPS with its ongoing lessons. Stress? As living disciples, may we hear over and over the words of Jesus, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me.”

*Patricia DeGroot, OblSB*

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**PRAYER**

Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways!
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives Thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise...

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and Thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm.

—*Excerpt from “The Brewing of Soma,” John Greenleaf Whittier.*
FATHER’S DAY PRAYER CARDS
Honor the many fathers and paternal figures in your parish with a prayer card from LPi featuring a vibrant image of the Christ Child and St. Joseph on the front, and a blessing for Father’s Day on the reverse. Prayer cards are available in English or Spanish. Order by June 9 for delivery in time for Father’s Day.

CATHOLIC MEDIA CONFERENCE, June 20-23, 2017, Quebec
The Catholic Press Association hosts the Catholic Media Conference (CMC) each year, where decision makers in Catholic communications and those interested in the field come together to share information, to learn about the changing industry, and to network with each other. This year’s conference will take place in Quebec City, June 20-23; online registration is available through June 2 here.

CATHOLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN
The annual Catholic Communication Campaign will be taken up in many dioceses on the weekend of May 28. This national collection supports the dissemination of great Catholic content in a variety of media formats. Collection resources are available from the USCCB website. LPi customers can also find the materials on the Art & Media Portal.

MIDWEEK REFLECTION EMAIL SIGN-UP
Know others who might be interested in receiving Connect! Midweek Reflection? Forward this email or send them an email to sign up here.