

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday of Ordinary Time | For Sunday, January 31, 2021

A Tranquil Soul

Written by Br. John-Marmion Villa

Deuteronomy 18:15-20

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

Mark 1:21-28



Brené Brown's 2010 book entitled, ["The Gifts of Imperfection"](#) introduces a term that I love: gremlins. I previously only knew that word as the title of the [1984 film with Howie Mandel](#). Brown refers to negative self-talk as "gremlins." Self-talk is that interior conversation that we have, either positive or negative. This self-talk governs our moods, attitudes, and worldview.

In the spiritual life, there's a similar concept. The Christian East calls it λογίζομαι (logizomai) which roughly means 'thoughts.' These logizomai (or thoughts) of the spiritual life are akin to gremlins or negative self-talk in the psychological sphere. In Christian spirituality, the goal is Christ and becoming more like him in every way. But the logizomai can get in the way, just as the gremlins of negative self-talk can get in the way of psychological health. The nagging quality of these logizomai might be described as temptations, yet [today's Gospel](#) calls out these plaguing thoughts as 'unclean spirits.' We all have them; they come in varied ways and intensities, affecting every facet of our lives, in small and in big ways. And [St. Paul wants us to be free of these anxiety-producing thoughts](#) that disrupt the interior peace and quietude for which our souls so desperately long. St. Paul isn't saying that the demands of responsible living are detrimental to the spiritual life. Rather, he is saying that the presence of these tempting logizomai are the beginnings of sin taking deeper root in our soul, influencing our attitudes and behaviors, moving us farther away from the image of Christ within our souls.

These pesky unclean spirits know the power of Christ, even though we might not; they lose their stronghold when we call on the name of Jesus, just like darkness immediately disappears when I turn on the light switch as I enter a room. In the spiritual realm, these unclean spirits are

there only because I have knowingly, or sometimes unknowingly, given them permission to be there. But I also have the power to evict them! Calling on Jesus' name is not like some magical incantation or spell that we wield over dark forces. The Catechism describes it this way: "The invocation of the holy name of Jesus is the simplest way of praying always. When the holy name is repeated often by a humbly attentive heart, the prayer is not lost by heaping up empty phrases, but holds fast to the word and "brings forth fruit with patience." This prayer is possible "at all times" because it is not one occupation among others but the only occupation: that of loving God, which animates and transfigures every action in Christ Jesus," (CCC 2668).

[St. Diadochos of Photiki](#) describes the opposite reality of anxiety, tranquility of soul, and how to come about it:

The light that true knowledge gives out is the ability to distinguish unerringly what is right from what is wrong. This being so, the path of uprightness — which leads the mind towards God, the radiant sun of righteousness — takes that same mind into an unbounded light of knowledge and then leads it on to seek trustingly for love.

Those who are struggling in battle ought always to keep their souls free of the tumultuous waves of distraction. If they do this, the mind will be able to distinguish among the thoughts that come to it. The good thoughts, sent by God, they can store in the treasure-house of their memory. The evil thoughts, sent by the devil, they can throw out.

In just the same way, when the sea is calm, the fisherman can see to the bottom of it and practically no fish can escape his gaze; but if it is stirred up by wind and storm, it becomes opaque when in calm times it was transparent — and when that happens, even the wiliest fisherman is wasting his time.

The tranquil soul is one free of the anxieties described by St. Paul and the unclean spirits described in the Gospel. But this tranquility of soul is not a cheap quality; it must be earned through daily disciplines of prayer, fasting, and repentance. This is what we can do; it is Jesus who returns us to our right minds (cf [Mk 5:15](#); [Lk 15:17](#)) because ours was transformed and renewed by the power of Jesus' name (cf [Rom 12:2](#)). Imagine what life could be like if we continually operated out of a tranquil soul rather than an anxious one!

Br. John-Marmion Villa

PRAYER

Lord, please put your peace in my heart.
I am worried and anxious about many things.
My mind races and obsesses.
I can't help thinking about my problems.
And the more I think about them,
The more depressed I become.
I feel like I'm sinking down in quicksand
And can't get out.
Calm me, Lord.
Slow me down; put your peace in my heart.