

- It's an anxious time we are living through. So many of us have many more burdens and cares now than ever before.
- But living in a constant state of anxiety is not God's explicit will for us. While He allows us to undergo periods of suffering and anxiety as a means of purifying us, God wants His children to live in peace – despite the difficulties of the world around us.
- The saints manage to do this. The saints are people who keep a sense of peace, even under the most pressing and difficult of circumstances. Their peace is the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- In his 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, which we hear from today, St. Paul says to the people of Corinth: "I should like you to be free of anxieties." And this is what God wants of us, too.
- So how do we remain free of anxiety in today's world, which is rife with division, strife, and perils both economic and physical? How can we maintain a sense of peace as we endure the sufferings that envelope us?
- Last Sunday I spoke about St. Agnes and the supernatural way she looked at this world. While Agnes lived in this world and enjoyed the privileges her status and wealth provided, she understood that this visible, material world is not as important as the next world.
- Even as one so young, St. Agnes knew that, as a Christian, she was a stranger and sojourner in this world, and that her real home was in Heaven.
- She knew that her beauty and wealth were as nothing compared to the incomparable beauty and riches of knowing Christ intimately, and thus dying to protect her virginity and for refusing to deny our Faith were easy for St. Agnes.
- Because she kept focused on Christ and the Heaven she knew awaited her, in that supreme moment of testing, St. Agnes could see her martyrdom as simply a means of walking down the aisle as a bride going to meet her Bridegroom. And she did it in confidence and peace!
- St. Agnes, like all saints, had an intimate relationship with our Lord. She was so closely united to Him, and thus the sufferings of this world were as nothing compared to what she knew she was gaining by her death. She suffered, but she was peaceful in her suffering.
- The lesson here is that the closer we are to Christ, the deeper and more intimate our relationship with Him, the more peaceful we will be – regardless of the vicissitudes of life.
- So we, too, must constantly strive for union with Christ, for in this is our salvation. Indeed, St. Teresa of Ávila explains that the more closely united we are with our Lord and His will, the holier we become.
- In her magnum opus, *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa explains that we move through our own interior castle as we progressively achieve union with our Lord – until the point in the final and most interior part of the castle, our soul experiences a mystical marriage with our Lord.
- This is the greatest foretaste of Heaven we can experience on earth, and at this point we care for nothing at all but God and His holy will. We still suffer, but we do so in peace!
- So how do we find union with Christ, this sanctifying union enabling us to remain peaceful amidst even the most worrisome and difficult of circumstances? What must we do to unite ourselves to Him as did the saints?
- It begins with simple obedience to God's commandments, which are spelled out for us in Sacred Scripture and in the constant and authentic teachings of the Church, for we cannot be united to God and His holy will if we willingly disobey Him.

- In the first reading we are told of the importance of listening to the Lord, and the responsorial psalm encourages us not to harden our hearts when we hear the Lord's voice.
- The point of these readings is that we must have a willingness to listen to God.
- The responsorial psalm we have today is Psalm 95, which is known as the Invitatory Psalm. In other words it is a psalm by which God invites us. In particular, our Lord is inviting us to union with Him. This psalm gives us a couple of keys to entering into union with our Lord.
- What are these keys? First, we must cultivate gratitude in our lives. Psalm 95 tells us to enter into God's presence with thanksgiving, joyfully singing to Him. So at all times, we must keep ever before us the good things God has done for us.
- I spoke a bit about this last Sunday, when I mentioned how important it is to examine ourselves regularly both to know our sins and to see God's blessings. When we can see how God blesses us, we naturally want to draw closer to Him in obedience.
- Gratitude naturally breeds a deeper love and devotion within us.
- But we must also cultivate humility. Psalm 95 tells us to "bow down in worship," to "kneel before the Lord Who made us." And so, when we come before our Lord, whether in private prayer or in public worship like the Mass, it's important to humble ourselves.
- We cultivate humility by recognizing both God's greatness and our own nothingness. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the Galatians: "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he is deluding himself" (Gal 6:3). It's true: we are as nothing compared to God.
- Today's Gospel shows us God's greatness, why we should humble ourselves before God, and why we should desire union with Him. In this marvelous Gospel story, Jesus exudes an authority hitherto unseen by the Israelites, and He even gives proof of His authority.
- Upon teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum, we hear that Jesus taught as "one having authority and not as the scribes." Why? Because in expounding upon the Scriptures, Jesus is speaking about Himself, about the Godhead.
- He's not conjecturing in any way, like the scribes. Jesus knows salvation history and the prophecies of old in a way more compelling than the scribes because it's His own personal history. He is the Word-Made-Flesh!
- Then, after teaching in an authoritative way that spellbinds the people listening, Jesus proves His authority by exorcizing the man with the unclean spirit.
- Like all the other exorcisms in Scripture, the demons here are absolutely powerless against Christ. And in this particular story we get the testimony of the demon as to Who Jesus Is: the Holy One of God!
- The ultimate point of this Gospel is that Jesus proves that He Is Who He says He Is! He is the Holy One of God, the only begotten Son of the Father. He is all-knowing and all-powerful. And He is Love and Mercy Incarnate.
- Only One Who is all these things could preach with the authority and drive out that demon as He did. This is why we must seek union with Him!
- Perhaps many of us feel so burdened by the world and its demands that we fail to hear Christ calling us. Perhaps instead of turning to our Lord as we should, we are looking for consolation in creature comforts.
- Perhaps many of us feel anxious because of the state our world is in and are struggling to hear our Lord's call. Yet He is calling each of us. Jesus is calling each of us to a closer union with Him, a union that demands our obedience and humble submission because of the authority He wields. But it's a union that will us to salvation!

- Knowing not only of His power, but of His desire to save us from our sins, may we all draw closer in union with our Lord by being ever obedient to His commandments, giving thanks for His many blessings, and humbly submitting ourselves to His authority.
- And then may we be freed from the anxieties that are plaguing our world, and enjoy the peace that only true union with our Lord can bring.