

11-3-19 Do Not Be Afraid Put Your Trust in God
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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I was sort of disappointed this morning that we had electricity. Last week, it was a special service with the power off with all the candles lit, that calm and simplicity that comes with candlelight. We had people make comments that "I wish we did that more often," even. We have candlelight services during the year intentionally. At my house, we did not have power for three days, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday and we had a pretty great time. And I get interested once in a while, although I do not watch the news or read the newspaper, I get interested once in a while on what is going on in the public life, and I read a couple of newspaper articles about the locals response to the power outages, not interested in all in assigning blame this morning. Who cares?

But what I did find interesting was the profound majority of people responding with just open fear. Open fear. Two different articles in our local paper, focusing on the problems that it may have caused, interviewing people and comment after comment being fear based, not reality based, anxiety, worrying. It wasn't that something actually bad happened. It was that maybe something might happen. One of my favorites was, "What if something bad had happened and I needed to call for an emergency and I didn't have the electricity to make the call." That's like three degrees of worrying speculation. The snarky part of me is like, what if you walked over to your neighbor's house, who you don't even know who they are, introduced yourself and asked for help? What if you planned ahead? Because if you're that dependent on power, and some people really are, what in the world are you doing not planning to not be provided for by the world unconditionally at all times? That's ridiculous. And as people of God, we're not supposed to be afraid. In fact, in all of these quotes they have in the newspaper, some of you may have noticed, but there's all these fear-based quotes. What if this had happened and these people are bad and I deserve power, and everything.

And then there was one quote, "We had a great day. We took the day off; the kids didn't have school. We went down to the river and played or went to the park and played. It was a wonderful day with our family," and it was Sarah Steiger. It was an Orthodox Christian. I thought that was awesome, this little piece of sanity in the midst of what is very normal, we're not being judgmental here, what is very normal and common, but it's not Christ centered and it certainly is unhealthy.

We are not called to be people who fear anything. And this fear that we have these days, I think this is a very important and in the end, spiritual, essentially spiritual observation to make, that the more we expect for the world to provide for us the things that we need, the further we get away from God and the more anxiety we have. The more we rely on the world to provide everything we need, the further we get away from God and the more anxiety that we have. There is this incredible dynamic in the relationship that we develop with particularly technology where we feel more capable, and a lot of times we really are more capable of getting things done because of the access to data that we have and how convenient it is, and we're walking around all with these tiny computers in our hands that give us all sorts of information, and there's this incredible blessing that does come with that.

Two years ago when I was in Greece, my wife and I were driving around with our two oldest kids, and we realized it was so much more relaxing driving along the highway than it was when we had been there previously. And I stopped and thought about it for a minute and I realized it was because we had the GPS going on our phone. I was in a foreign country, I could barely make out the signs coming

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down the highway, and I didn't have to pay attention to anywhere I was going because Siri would tell me where to turn in Greece. She's terrible at pronouncing Greek words, by the way. It provided a lot of entertainment. Turn right on [Greek word] street or something. But it was wonderful. We literally had a better pilgrimage to a holy place like the country of Greece than we had before because we had that technology with us.

At the same time, recently I canceled a service on my phone, and I'm not a phone addict, those of you who know that about me know it, but I went to go, up into this year, to a place that I've gone many times before, and it made me nervous the whole time. I was so ashamed of myself that I was going someplace I knew very well, I'd gone there many times before, I had multiple California maps in my car, and it made me kind of scared on the inside that I wasn't being told exactly where to go. "In 150 feet turn right." It created this anxiety within me and I realized I'm not becoming more capable, I'm becoming less capable. My memory is getting worse, I'm so lazy that the idea of pulling over on the side of the road and getting out a map and checking where I'm going is unthinkable. Neanderthal. Right?

But when the power went out, we saw a lot of people panicking, a lot of people worried, a lot of people afraid, truly afraid because part of the false god, the deity that is out there that the world believes in, whether it's agnostic or atheistic, there is this provider out there that is going to provide everything. People will debate whether it is the government, or whether it is technology, or artificial intelligence, or something, but we all have a god. And when our god is the false god, we end up disappointed. When our false god is ourselves, like Adam and Eve in the garden, of Eden stopping for a minute and listening to the voice of the serpent saying, "Ah, you won't die, not right away if you eat of the fruit that God has forbidden you to eat. You'll become," as the proper translation is, "you will become gods." Not like a god, you will become gods, little 'g'. Knowing everything from that which is good, all the way to that, which is evil. And Adam and Eve's initial sin was to assume that because they were created with the potential to be in union with God and reflect him, to be like him, to be seen from the outside as little gods, that because that potential was there, they had the right to fulfill it on their terms and their timing.

One of the greatest differences between the Orthodox teaching of Adam and Eve in the garden and other Christian interpretations is that we believe that God intended for them to eat of that tree eventually in his time, when they were mature enough spiritually to be able to take on the knowledge of good and evil and have it not stumbled them. God knows everything from that which is perfectly good to that which is completely evil. To know that is to be like him. The problem wasn't that they only disobeyed, which they did do, the problem wasn't just that they did not repent of their sin, but the problem was they weren't ready to be exposed to what they were exposed to.

And here we are in the world and we're really... we have that expectation still that we ought to have everything we want all the time and we want to be able to know everything very easily. It's like trying to be like God. He knows everything and it's very easy for him. For us, we were supposed to study and go to school and now we just Google it. It's a lot easier, but we're also becoming less smart. We all know that memory is getting worse, nobody even knows their own telephone number, let alone their friend's or family. I've been with people, even in the last month, that the power went out and they, "We have this regular plugin phone that works when the power's out. It's amazing technology."

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And people will come in to use it and they don't know the phone number of their own house or their own spouse. I can remember my phone number from growing up in Boulder Creek 35, 40 years ago because you had to dial it every time. It reinforced your memory.

So where am I going with this? We are not to be people that are afraid, but if we count on something other than God to give us consolation, we will be afraid. We will have anxiety. If I think that I am God and I deserve everything that is godlike, I get really upset when people take something away from me. One of the observations in the newspaper, which was a wonderful observation, was when there's a natural disaster and the power goes out, it's almost enjoyable. We all gather together, we get out our lanterns, and we go back to a simpler, actually more natural existence, if you think about it. God didn't create electricity. He created... Well, I guess he did. He created the lightning, but we harnessed it. There weren't any light bulbs in God's creation. There was the sun and the moon. And the further we move towards this paradise that we are creating, the more our ego is inflated, and we believe that we are becoming godlike but without God.

Saint Maximus, the confessor, says that we will all be deified, become like God after we die. Some of us with the grace of the Holy Spirit, some of us without it. When you go through the process of deification with the Holy spirit, it's called heaven. When you go through the process of deification without the Holy Spirit's presence, it's called hell. And so to be living in a world where we're trying to bring about the kind of perfection that we long for since leaving the garden of Eden, but we're trying to achieve that perfection without God, we're creating hell on earth. Things are getting worse, not better.

But we are not to be people who are afraid. The anxiety that comes with the power being out, or my phone not working, or not being able to go to work today and not having control over everything all the time, pretending that I'm God and I'm supposed to be, I'm the Pantocrator, I'm the almighty. I'm the one supposed to be getting my way all the time. And suddenly something strips that fantasy away for a moment and I realize how dependent I am. I'm dependent on someone else giving me electricity. It's amazing, but it turned out I can't produce it myself. The way my home functions is dependent on somebody else, and if I don't accept that, it creates anxiety.

But as Christians, we are not to be an anxious people. When God was speaking with the Holy Prophet Isaiah centuries ago, millennia ago, he said to him, "Do not fear for I am with you." That will turn out to be the answer to all of our problems in this life. "Do not fear for I am with you." David in the Psalms cries out, "When I am afraid," it's okay to experience fear at times, we're not supposed to be fearful, but once in a while it hits us. What do we do? "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you," Psalm 56:3.

In the book of John, the Gospel of John, Christ says to us directly, the son of God, "Peace is what I leave with you." Not anxiety, not fear, not concern, not worry, not cares. "Peace is what I leave with you and it is my own peace that I give to you. I am peace. I do not give it as the world gives it to you." Do not, this is commandment of Christ, do not be worried or upset. Do not be afraid.

And when Christ was called upon to heal the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue, and while the ruler is talking to Christ, his servant comes off and says, "Don't bother the teacher anymore. Your

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daughter is dead." She's dead. She can't be healed, right? And Jesus literally says to the man, "Ignore what he is saying and only believe. Trust me, only believe." And that word only is amazing. It's not a suggestion to just focus on believing. It means that there is nothing else in existence in this moment other than your faith. Your faith alone will define everything. It doesn't matter the information that this person is brought to us, it doesn't matter that in most experiences of death, people don't recover from it. It matters that I am here in your life, I, the savior, and your faith will in me will fix everything. And they go to the house and the daughter is resurrected. The daughter is brought back to life despite the doubt, despite the mockery, despite the lack of faith that we all have and that even this father had. But the faith is what makes things right and real.

And as we experience God's providence in our life, including the power going out, including our car breaking down, including all of the struggles and misfortunes that come upon us in life, we are experiencing on a daily basis, moment by moment, the providence of God as he rules everything in the universe.

I recently read, and it was very profound for me to realize, that God's providence is not him momentarily interrupting the life that's going on. Think about that. I think a lot of us believe that. I had that same impression. God's providence is not him momentarily interrupting life as it goes by. To have this momentary contact with us or to momentarily see if his will and our will are aligned together, because ultimately that's the problem. We don't want to do it, God wants done. God's providence is life itself. God's providence, his energies is what is making the stars exist, and making the sunshine, and making the earth go around the sun. It is what is holding all of the molecules together and the atoms in their orbits. God's providence is life itself. God's will is being done all day, every day. It's just sometimes we recognize it.

And some of the hardest times to recognize that God's will is being done is when his will turns out to be contrary to ours, when we had a plan and the power went out, when we had a show that we wanted to watch, when we had work that we wanted to get done, when we had maybe an addiction that we wanted to fulfill or nurture, he took it away. And in that very moment, it's amazing, we are people who believe that God became man, we are a people that believe he revealed himself in the Old Testament, that he parted the Red Sea, we believe that he led Wiseman to him through a star. And yet when it comes to the power being out or my computer not working or my car breaking down, I feel abandoned by God. Isn't it weird? It's in the small things that we find if we really have faith or not. All of those other big ideas are these over-arching ideas that we can live and contain, we can keep them in this head right here for all of our life and say, "Yes, I'm a believer. Yes, I believe in Jesus Christ. Yes, I have all the right theology and the right doctrine, and I've read the scripture," and it never comes down here into the heart. We are never transformed as people of God.

And we see that when in the moment of God's providence affecting our lives and all of a sudden things are not going the way we wanted them to go. Is it okay because his will is being done? Is it okay? We don't have to enjoy it. I think a lot of the bad things in the world, God doesn't enjoy it all. He watches them happen. As Orthodox Christians, we do not believe that God causes natural disasters, earthquakes, tidal waves, that sort of thing. That's the effect of the fall. Creation is fallen just like man, but he lets it happen, he allows it to happen. He allows us to experience the suffering and the evil that we help bring into the world so that we will change. So that we will change.

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And so when we look at the inconveniences of our life, when we look at our will, our desire not getting done, not being fulfilled, that is the moment that we meet Christ. Is it okay really in the end that my will is not being done and that I have this opportunity to submit to the will of God or am I going to resist it? In the end, what we find out is that God's providence, his will is being done all day, every day no matter what we do. We can't stop it and neither can the devil and the demons.

And then during that experience of his providence, we are going through times of simply cooperating with the will of God or resisting it. When we cooperate with the will of God, we are becoming holy, we are being transformed, we are following Christ, we are being Christians, we are coming into grace of the Holy Spirit, we are headed towards salvation. When we resist the will of God, then we find ourselves despairing, lonely, disappointed, spiritually depressed. Everything seems like it's going wrong, nobody loves us and everything is wrong. So as Christians, let's look again at the will of God being done. Let's realize that, as Saint Paul said in the Epistle this morning to the Galatians, that God has the ability to reveal to us by his grace alone what we need to be doing and how to do it. Let's remember that Christ himself in the Gospel told the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and in the end of that parable, this is Jesus himself before the resurrection telling the people, "Even if a man were raised from the dead, you won't believe," not if you haven't already had faith in the prophets of the Old Testament, Moses, the law and the Prophets.

If you have not practiced faith already, voluntarily, accepting what God has told us is true, and believing it without a bunch of data, without a bunch of proof, without God having to cite his sources. If we have believed already, then when we hear that a man has been raised from the dead, we will believe even more. And this was Christ talking about his own resurrection. So as Christians in the world, 2000 years after the birth of Christ, let us remember that, that if we are not exercising faith, the faith that says, don't be afraid, don't worry, everything is going to be all right, my will is being done. If we are not voluntarily accepting that and putting it to work, we're not going to be able to truly embrace the reality of our risen Lord, he who truly was resurrected from the dead.

So let's throw away all of those worries and cares. Let's stop looking to the world for our consolation, and our security, and confidence, and instead defy the rational powers that tell us that we need proof, and experience the reality, the experience of the reality of having faith in Christ and his grace, changing everything in our lives.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.