

5th Sunday of Easter (A)  
(Acts 6:1-7 / John 14:1-12)  
18.05.2014

There are things that come our way in life that completely *throw us*, to speak colloquially.

When such things hit me now, I find a certain comfort in resorting to Eugene Peterson's rendering of John 14, verse 1 in his translation/paraphrase of the Bible entitled *The Message*.

Peterson renders the well-known verse *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me* in this way: *Don't let this thing throw you. You trust God, don't you?*

The fact that Peterson renders what our liturgical translation has us read as an exhortation *Trust in God* in a way that transforms it into a rhetorical question challenges me. It invites me to put my faith where my mouth is!

You see, it is one thing to say that we trust in God and to tell others to do that, but the question remains: do we really believe in the Lord's promises?

It is easy to exhort another to trust, but it is another thing to do so ourselves – especially when the going is tough and we are completely *thrown* by what has befallen us.

More often than not, we dream of God intervening to take our problems away, but that is not how it works.

We would like to think of a life without challenges, but that is not how life is.

There are times when we can all feel a bit like a broken-hearted mother I spoke to on the 'phone recently who said to me through tears: *I just went to church this evening and I sat there and I wept as I waited for the Eucharist to begin thinking of my daughter who looked so pained to learn that yet another job interview had not seen her awarded a job she wanted in a profession she is entirely given to.*

This mother went on to say to me: *It is so hard to take when you give yourself so much for others in life* (and those weren't self-deceptive words, for this woman really does that- she gives herself entirely for others). She went on: *It is so hard to take when the things you ask for, not for yourself, but in favour of someone else you care for, are not granted.*

While the kind of disappointment this woman felt is hard to take, not just for her, but for all of us we must hang in there, believing that the Lord is with us.

We must trust.

Let's admit it, we sometimes feel as that woman felt the evening we spoke: we feel let down by God and/or by others.

We must be careful not to allow these deceptions to *throw us*.

Let's be perfectly clear: it is not, as we sometimes hear it said, that if only we trusted enough, trusted more, then the Lord He would intervene and take our problems away.

It is not, as we sometimes hear it said, that if only we trusted in the Lord enough, trusted in Him more, all our difficulties, trials, suffering and pain would go away, dissolve and disappear.

Rather, what we discover is this: as we trust in Him, the Lord gives us the strength we need to face

up to all the challenges of life and He helps us work our way through them with courage and confidence.

Our consolation which comes from God's word is that the Lord is with us as we struggle with our problems. He is with us as we make our way through the inevitable trials, difficulties and pains of life.

Writing to the Romans, Paul goes as far as to tell us that God uses the difficulties we encounter in life to strengthen and fortify us in our faith and to lead us into an attitude of sure and certain hope, which ultimately won't be disappointed.

When Paul tells us that if only we place our trust in Jesus then we will experience peace, even in the midst of our trials, he is not just expounding a theory, he is actually sharing with us what was his own life experience.

When the apostle Paul wrote to the Romans that *patience develops strength of character, and helps us to trust in God more and more each time we use it, until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady* he was sharing what he had experienced as true for himself.

I find Peterson's paraphrase translation of that verse of the section of Romans 5 I have just quoted, to be, once again, a very enlightening and insightful rendering of the text.

*The Message* renders Romans 5, verses 4&5 thus: *We know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling short-changed. Quite to the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit.*

I am not denying that it may take us a time to come to see things this way.

It doesn't happen automatically!

But, I do believe that an attitude of faith, trust and hope can and will bring us to the point where we are led to see God's hand at work in our lives in and through everything we experience – including the negative experiences we are confronted with, our deceptions with others, the painful moments we are led to pass through, the trials and difficulties of all sorts we are all led to traverse at different stages of our lives.

While we may be able to see God's hand at work in all things with hindsight, it is often harder for us to see God's hand at work as we make our way forward through life.

Someone has rightly said something along these lines: *while we live our life going forward, we only understand our life by looking back at it.*

I suppose what I am wanting to see this morning really amounts to this.

While living our lives going forward, what we need to do to give ourselves confidence and trust enough to keep going at certain moments is this: to look backwards. It is as we remember God's action in our favour in the past, and as we look back over our lives with gratitude, that we are given to recognise the great things the Lord has done for us.

Seeing how God's hand was at work in our lives in the past, we are given the guarantee that He is there for us in our present difficulties and that He will be there for us in whatever trials may yet befall us.

This was how God's people Israel found strength for the challenges of life. They would recall God's

saving events of the past and this gave them confidence for the present and the future.

When we dare to live our lives in this way what happens is that we are ready to give ourselves in the here and now with *reckless confidence*.

We find courage and strength to respond to the Lord's call when He asks us to place our trust in Him and to renew our trust in others who have let us down.

When we live our lives in this way, we come to understand that the *paschal mystery* is not just about an event concerning one man who lived a long time ago – the man Jesus of Nazareth – but that it is an on-going reality in our lives too.

Jesus who says to us in the passage from John we read this morning *Trust in me*, is the same who said to His disciples in Mark's gospel: *Have faith in God ... and as you pray believe that you have already received what you have asked for*.

That woman who cried down the 'phone to me not so long ago might say that she didn't get what she asked for, since her daughter didn't get the job she wanted, but, dare I suggest, that maybe she did in fact get what she asked for in prayer.

You see, fundamentally, I know that what she really asked for in prayer was her daughter's well-being.

I saw the woman's prayer as having been answered when her daughter contacted me some twenty-four hours later and in referring to her failed job interview said to me in all sincerity: *God is good. Something else is planned for me*.

I know those words weren't spoken flippantly by that young woman.

They really were/they are an expression of confident trust.

I heard them to be, what I called a little moment ago, an expression of *reckless confidence*.

The recently deceased spiritual author Manning Brennan, from whom I retain the expression *reckless confidence*, shares his personal experience at one point in this way: *Reckless confidence for me is the unshakable conviction that Jesus and the Father love me in a way that defies imagination. It means to accept without reservation all that the Abba of Jesus has ordained for my life, to have the attitude of Jesus when He prayed in the garden, 'Not My will but Yours be done'. It is to make my own the prayer of Dag Hammarskjöld, 'For all that has been, thanks. For all that shall be, yes.'*

Easter hope gives us to see that the risen Christ is in our own lives right now. It leads us to believe that God is working out His purpose in all that befalls us in the present, just as He has worked out His purpose in the past – sometimes using the strangest means to lead to this end.

When we think of it: how many seeming coincidences in our lives have transpired with hindsight to have been God-incidents!

To see the coincidences of life as God-incidents does not relieve us of our responsibility.

To the contrary, it engages us to respond to and to correspond with whatever it is that God asks of us at times when seemingly disparate things are brought together in our lives in strange ways.

It seems to me that what Jesus asks of His disciples and of each one of us through the words of the gospel passage we hear this morning boils down to this fundamentally: *Trust in me* at all times!

Trust in me especially at those times when trust is a real challenge.

Trust in me when your trust in others has been disappointed and also when you have let yourself down.

We must ask ourselves:

Are we going to dare to trust?

Are we going to dare to live the confidence of heart to which Jesus calls us?

Perhaps the greatest encouragement we have to do this is to recognise the confidence and trust the Lord has placed in each one of us!

In saying that, I am reminded of a word of Abraham Heschel which says: *God calls upon us to trust in Him for one day of the week (the Sabbath) for all the other days of the week He trusts in us.*

Is it not true that the trust the Lord places in us is disproportionate to the trust we place in Him?

Heschel's insight helps us to see that Jesus asks from us nothing in His regard that He does not live in ours.

If the Lord calls upon us to trust in Him – and He does – this is because of the enormous trust He places in you and me.

May we not disappoint Him in the hopes and expectations He holds in His heart in our regard.

Although the Scripture texts I have quoted in this reflection – such as that of Romans 5 – are challenging passages of the Bible, the reality is that the Lord already lives in our regard what He challenges us to live in His regard.

God trusts us!

The trust to which Jesus calls us is reciprocal trust therefore.

The trust in God that is asked of us is a response to the trust the Lord has placed in us.

May we be graced to recognise this.

May we commit and engage ourselves to live with the Lord, in mutual trust, mutual confidence of heart!

Amen!