

Chapter II: The Present Moment

Part V of VIII

5. TOMORROW CAN TAKE CARE OF ITSELF

If it's a mistake to add the burden of the past to the weight of the present, it's a still worse mistake to burden the present with the future. The remedy for that tendency is to meditate on the lesson contained in the Gospel about abandonment to God's Providence and ask for God's grace to practice it. "Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?...Therefore do not be anxious, saying 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" (Matthew 6: 25-34).

Again, this does not mean being improvident and irresponsible. We are obliged to plan for the future and take thought for tomorrow. But we should do it *without worrying*, without the care that gnaws at the heart but doesn't solve anything-and often prevents us from putting our hearts into what we have to do here and now. Hearts anxious about tomorrow can't be open to the grace of the present moment.

Like the manna that fed the Hebrew people in the desert, grace can't be stockpiled. We can't build up reserves of grace but only receive it moment by moment, as part of the "daily bread" we pray for in the Our Father. To be free of the burden of the future as well as the past, we need "re-education." Here are some commonsense points that can help.

Things seldom happen as we expect. Most of our fears and apprehensions turn out to be completely imaginary. Difficulties we anticipated become very simple in reality; and the real difficulties are things that didn't occur to us. It's better to accept things as they come, one after another, trusting that we will have the grace to deal with them at the right time, than to invent a host of scenarios about what may happen-scenarios that normally turn out to be wrong. The best way to prepare for the future is to put our hearts into the present. In the Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples they will be hauled before tribunals, and then he adds: "Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict" (Luke 21: 14-15).

Projecting our fears into the future cuts us off from reality and prevents us from dealing with the present situation as we should. It saps our best energies. In another passage of her journal, Etty Hillesum says: "If one burdens the future with one's worries, it cannot grow organically. I am filled with confidence, not that I shall succeed in worldly things, but that even when things go badly for me I shall still find life good and worth living" (Hillesum, *Interrupted Life*, pp. 212-213).

Fear of suffering, as we've seen, causes more pain than suffering does. We need to live accordingly.

We have to fight them daily, like fleas, those many small worries about the morrow, for they sap our energies. We make mental provision for the days to

come, and everything turns out differently, quite differently. Sufficient unto the day. The things that have to be done must be done, and for the rest we must not allow ourselves to become infested with thousands of petty fears and worries, so many motions of no confidence in God. Everything will turn out all right... Ultimately, we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace, and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world (Ibid., pp. 266-267).

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