

“BE NOT AFRAID!”

Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

Once Shree Ramkrishna Paramhans was walking on sea shore. Then a young man came running to him. He was shivering with fear. A monkey was after him and he was running fearing the monkey.

“Stop. Why are you running?” Paramhans asked him.

“The monkey coming after me may attack me if I stop”, the young man said.

“The monkey would not do anything to you”, Paramhans said with authority.

Seeing the young man standing the monkey too stopped on its track at a distance.

“Fearing the monkey you ran and so the monkey came after you. But you face the monkey with courage”, Paramhans ordered the young man.

The young man turned towards the monkey and seeing the man coming the monkey turned and ran away from there.

“Our world is like that monkey. If we are afraid of the world, then, the world would frighten us. But if we take away fear from our mind, then we can face the world fearlessly and go ahead in life and succeed,” said Paramhans to the young man when the monkey was out of sight.

That young man, who became a disciple of Paramhans, was none other than Swami Vivekananda.

From the first meeting of these two great men we can derive some important lessons for life. We can succeed in life if we dare to face the world with courage without any fear or anxiety.

I learned this lesson from a book which I read about a year back. The name of the book is “Crossing the Treshhold of Hope” written by Pope John Paul II. With the message of hope Pope tells us in the book, “Be not afraid!”

The whole book “Crossing the Treshhold of Hope” is about the current crisis confronting the world in the form of answers given by Pope John Paul II to the questions asked by the Italian journalist Mr. Vittorio Messori.

The journalist Messori asked the Pope John Paul “You are the spiritual and religious head of the Catholic Church in the whole world. The Pope is considered the man on earth who represents the Son of God...Have you ever once hesitated in your belief in your relationship with Jesus Christ... about the truth of Catholic faith?

Answering the question the Pope said, “Be not afraid! I proclaimed it when I accepted to become

the Pope. These are not empty words.”

Jesus himself has given this message to many people. The angel Gabriel told Mary, “Don’t be afraid” (Lk 1, 30). The same thing is also said to Joseph, “Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife” (Mt 1, 20). Jesus told the same thing to his disciples on different occasions. After his resurrection Jesus has repeatedly told Peter and all the disciples, “You must not be afraid” (Mt. 25, 5).

The Church proclaims this message of Jesus Christ. The Pope also gives this same message to all. “Be not afraid!”. On October 16, 1978 on assuming the papacy in his first speech the Pope John Paul II proclaimed it, “Be not afraid!”

In the last part of “Crossing the Treshold of Hope” answering a question Pope says, “Be not afraid!” This sermon and message of the Pope is for all people.

Then, raising a question himself, why the people should never be afraid, he said, Jesus Christ has given the gift of redemption to all people, so people should not be afraid. “For God loved the world so much that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life” (Jn 3, 16). This son of God is always present in human history as the Redeemer. He is always at work.

Often the reason for a person’s fear is some experience of childhood. Knowingly or unknowingly the parents make the children to fear something or other. “You keep quiet, otherwise the eagle will carry you away”. “Some wild animal (often fox) will come and eat you”. “Bhoot will come and take you away”. The parents give such threats to children and their effect remains in the sub-conscience of a child for life.

The parents and teachers should always try to save children from fright. They should help the frighten children to get rid of fear as the nurse of Mohandas Gandhi did.

As Gandhiji tells in his autobiography “Experiments with Truth”, he was very frightened of darkness in his childhood. So he never dared to set foot outside house at night. If the child Mohandas needed to go out to toilet or on some urgent matters he then used to wake up someone who could accompany him out into the darkness.

One day his nurse told him, “Mohandas, why are you afraid darkness? God is with you. You recited the name of Rama and Rama will protect you”.

Then Gandhiji started taking the name of Rama as suggested by his nurse when he needed to go out alone at night and he became free from the fear of darkness.

A sense of fear is there in the lives of most people in lesser or greater degree. But succumbing to fear can totally destroy the life of a person. A person can also look for the source of fear. She or he can discover the folly of false fear and overcome it and lead a healthy and successful life.

Some people are afraid of their future and they worry with fear of the unknown. They can

certainly face the problems of the present. But they are greatly worried about the future of themselves and of their children. Once a father of two children studying in primary school come to me and said, “Father, I am worried to death about the future of my two boys. Both do not study well. Both are repeating this year. Shall I consult a soothsayer? Can I know the future of the two?”

“Friend, the faith which you have in the prediction of the soothsayer, put that faith in God. The soothsayer can at most predict the future of you and of your two kids. But you do not know for sure that prediction will come true or not. The soothsayer has no power to altar your future. He knows to take money from your pocket. But he cannot assure you of your future. Only God can take care of the future of you and of your two children. You put your trust in the God and walk in his trust. God protects all those who put their trust in them. He never abandons those who trust in Him.

There may be some root cause of the people who are too much afraid. Fearsome incidents of the past make a person frightened. A hair-raising event makes a person terribly afraid. So it is necessary to find out the root cause of such events to over come fright and fear. When a person understands such event and consequently the person is able to overcome the fear and be master of such situation.

When a person understands the inner forces at work in him/her, then he/she is able to overcome the outer forces of influences and can become a fearless person once and for all.

People who are suffering from imaginary fear without any root cause can face them with faith and trust in God that God is with them and protecting them all the time. There is no protector greater than God. God always keep his promise. He has said, “Be not afraid!” He has also said, “I will be with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt. 28, 10 & 20).

Let us place ourselves at the lotus feet of the God. Let us offer ourselves to Him with all our talents, qualities, achievements, weaknesses and failures. He is all powerful to protect us and bring us out of our fear.

Finally, let us remember there are success and failures, happiness and suffering in our lives. God may not take us out of these things but he will certainly protect and preserve us through them all.

We may express our faith and trust in the Lord through prayer of a Psalm in the Bible:

“To you, O Lord, I offer my prayer;
in you, my God, I trust” (Psalm 25, 1-2).

(contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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