

**Homily for Evening Prayer—Lent II 2013**  
***Facing Our Fears***

Did you know that there is a website that claims to list every possible human fear?

It's phobialist.com—

They are listed alphabetically—

“A” alone has over 60 phobias or fears—

One of my fears is listed near the top of the “A” list—

*Acrophobia*—fear of heights

Another rather familiar and fairly common fear in the “A” list is *arachnaphobia*—fear of spiders.

There were well over 700 fears listed.

What's that all about?

Is there that much to fear in the world?

Or are we just overly fearful?

It is natural to feel afraid,

to have a sense of fear for one's safety and wellbeing—

To be completely without such fear can be dangerous—

There are people who do not experience fear at all.

Generally these are people who are psychopaths or sociopaths—

people who do not have a sense of personal fear.

Not everyone who lacks a sense of person fear becomes a criminal, but generally the most dangerous people

in the world are quite frankly nearly completely “fearless.”

So it seems that it is not a good thing

to be completely without fear.

To be fully human is to have some fear.

Fear is a perfectly natural emotion that helps us recognize danger and respond appropriately.

And yet this healthy emotion can turn into an unhealthy or even pathological response—fear can take hold of us and paralyze us.

And, perhaps it's a matter of what

or of whom we are afraid

and what we do or don't do when we are afraid.

Nobel Peace Prize winner, anti-apartheid activist, and former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela has said:

*I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.*

*The brave [person] is not one who does not feel afraid, but one who conquers that fear.*

Or as John Wayne put it:  
*Courage is being scared to death . . .  
and saddling up any way.*

So, if we sing with the psalmist that  
*The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
of whom shall I be afraid?*

So . . . what are you afraid of  
and why are we afraid?  
And how do we conquer our fear?

Sometimes we are afraid because  
we think we are not going to get something we want  
and other times we are afraid  
because we think that something we have  
will be taken away.

There are many things to explore  
about when fear is good and healthy  
and when it's total bondage.  
One thing I kept thinking about this week  
is how fear keeps us "turned in our selves"—  
Our fears can disorient us—  
they can turn us away from God,  
away from our true selves,  
away from the good we do with and for the world,  
for others.

But what if we remembered the words of Isaiah  
that echo the words of Jesus—  
*Do not fear, for I am with you,  
do not be afraid,  
for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you,  
I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

What if we took these words to heart and  
asked God to do just that—  
strengthen us, help us, uphold us—  
give us the courage and faith we need  
to override our fears—to "saddle up" and keep going.  
We too easily forget that we do not face our fears alone.  
We too easily forget that God can use even our fears  
and our struggles as opportunities for growth  
in character and in a greater capacity

for faith, hope and love.  
What is more, we forget that God can use our fears  
and our struggles to help others.

This is not to say that fear and crises and loss  
are not real or painful.  
I'm not saying that you should feel guilty  
about feeling afraid or not being courageous all the time.  
What I am saying is that when we feel afraid—  
as we all do from time to time or even, perhaps, every day—  
that is when we need to pray—  
for God to “save us as he promised”  
from our fears, our sin, our unbelief.

So tonight, at the time of the candle lighting for healing—  
I invite each one of us to name a fear (or two or even three)  
and then light a candle asking God  
to save us from our fears,  
to use our fears to help others,  
to strengthen our faith, hope and love  
so that we might go out with good courage,  
not knowing where we go,  
but only that God's hand is leading us  
and God's love is supporting us.

Good people of God,  
do not be afraid!