

## Inner Peace and Anxiety

In his great work “The Imitation of Christ” the fifteenth-century spiritual writer Thomas à Kempis wrote these words of advice: “Above all things, keep peace within yourself, then you will be able to create peace among others. It is better to be peaceful than learned.”

Peace is very much a gift and that applies too to inner peace. We are all different as individuals and so inner peace may come easier to some people than to others. Even in turbulent and uncertain conditions it is possible to have inner peace. And yet I suspect most of in those circumstances would experience fear or panic. We only need to think of the various areas of conflict of our world today.

Arguably the greatest barrier to inner peace is anxiety. By temperament some people are very laid back and take things in their stride. They do not worry about things but get on with life. Yet I imagine more of us are prone to worry and anxiety. I certainly am. Even little things can prey on our minds and be very difficult to set aside. We may even find it difficult to sleep or to concentrate.

Our Lord’s words in our reading just now (Matthew 6.25-33) are thus a serious challenge to us. Do not worry. Being anxious will not do you any good – the very opposite in fact. Birds and plants do not worry and yet they are provided for. Instead put your trust in God who knows all your needs and who will provide them.

This is all very well, you may say, but even Christians are not exempt from problems in life: problems of health or of finance, or problems with relationships. And such anxiety can be very wearing. Yet if we do put our trust in God then at least we can see that anxiety for what it is and with God’s help try to deal with it.

If we overcome our anxiety then we will be better able to achieve true peace of mind. We then hope that something of our peace will rub off onto other people, that even in our everyday encounters we might become peacemakers. For in our Bible passage Jesus is not saying that we should be oblivious to what is happening around us and live in a cosy cocoon. Far from it. The real challenge comes in the final verse: “But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness”. We are to be active, to do our bit to work for God’s kingdom: for peace, and love, and harmony.

Can this be extended beyond the individual level to that of nations or internationally, though? As Christians we believe that it should and indeed must do. For we are talking about God’s world, God’s people. His care and concern extends to everyone. And that is a cause of great hope and of great joy - hope and joy that it is our calling and our duty to share with others.

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