



Arise

A reflection / letter to foster on pastoral and spiritual growth
By Bob Traupman / contemplative writer
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You Never Know

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Thank God, my life is now simpler and more predictable. What a gift that is for me. My life has acquired a sense of stability now. But still . . .

. . . **you never know.** You never know what tomorrow will bring. Or for that matter, what the next moment will bring. The stability that you and I have acquired could be cut from under us at any moment. We could suddenly be fired from our job. We could have a heart attack as my priest/buddy Phil did at age 46 and, of a sudden, be gone.

How well do we face uncertainty? How will we cope if we are hit by a hurricane or a tornado or a fire or a flood, or if you live in Sicily, by lava from a volcano? How do students cope while waiting to hear if they have been accepted into the college of their choice? Sudden events, such as a car accident, a natural disaster, or the threat of terrorism can confront us with stress on every level. Kids who grow up in the West Bank of Jerusalem never know when a kickball game will turn deadly. How can people cope with that level of senseless uncertainty? Can Palestinian or Israeli children have any kind of normalcy? Will they be gun-shy all their life?

Many of us have great difficulty dealing with the uncertainties and insecurities of life. **Some of us, however, find some level of security in the midst of insecurity.** Some of us roll with the punches better than others. We plod along not sure what will happen next but somehow we know it will be OK.

What we need to do is to look for certainty and security on a deeper level.

Does belief in God or an afterlife make us less uncertain? Does faith make a difference in our lives?

It would seem that having a sense of the presence of God in our life will give us a foundation that is not so easily shaken by uncertainty. The

scriptures present Jesus as the one who can quiet the storms of life (Matthew 8:23-27); he can be the Rock, the foundation on whom our life is built.

No human being can know for certain what the next moment will bring. Uncertainty is just part of life. No matter what the next moment will bring, we can be assured, if we have some faith and hope, that the presence of God in our life will give us the strength and the courage to hang on and hang in. God will give us the grace and the resources to deal with any life situation, though it may be difficult or not to our liking.

(Though I very often see God's benevolent hand, I find it difficult to understand how wars and earthquakes and severe famine can work toward anyone's good!) It bothers me more and more that I live a comfortable life while so many millions live in misery. I can be insecure in my security.)

"To be at ease is to be unsafe."

--John Henry Cardinal Newman

Life has its uncertainties and sometimes, unanswered questions. That, it would seem, is the essential drama, the yin and yang, of human life, the tension between the uncertainty and insecurity of the human existence and the certainty and security of God, who draws us toward God's self.

What we are called to do is to ACCEPT that all human beings have to live with uncertainty and to accept that, at times, we are just going to feel bad for awhile. But if we can say "this too shall pass" we have the beginnings of hope.

I believe that we belong to a meaningful universe; that things happen for a reason. I just trust that. But spending time trying to discern the reasons for things is not the issue in a crisis

situation. We have to get to work on our coping skills.

There will be times that we will have to proceed on blind faith: Life sometimes does cast us adrift amidst things that do not make sense, that open for us a whole new series of questions that do not cough up easy answers.

And yet . . .

. . . I believe that God is the source -- and the endpoint -- of our meaning and that God has all eternity to resolve the questions that we cannot resolve or cannot accept in this life. **We need to be patient with our unanswered questions.** One day, on God's time, we will live into the answers.

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People who have a desperate need to control their own or other peoples' lives will have the most difficulty with uncertainty or insecurity. **People who have a strong need to control (and manipulate) the lives of others have difficulty praying or living the essential daily prayer "Thy will be done!"**

Many of us like to be in control. **But control is ultimately an illusion.** We are, in reality, not in control, for at the very next moment, we might have a fatal heart attack with not even a second more to arrange our lives.

At one point, I told a friend of mine that I was upset and very anxious about my computer. He told me that I was anxious because I couldn't accept not being able to control it. Realizing that anxiety was a function of my need to control astonishingly alleviated much of it. And, in fact, I am far less anxious than I had been. I have learned to accept that uncertainty is just a part of life. I am learning to roll with the punches.

The fact is that other people are often unpredictable. How many of us get upset because we cannot control our spouse or our children!

God gives us the gift of free will, the consequence of which is the choice between good and evil. We are free to choose good or choose evil, to choose God or not choose God. This notion is at the heart of the Gospel. Jesus died on the Cross because his Father did not want to coerce people into doing good.

The absolute result of this stance toward the human race on God's part is that we must learn to deal with uncertainty and insecurity. Our being in control of any part of our lives is relative. The fact



is that we could die tomorrow. But often we are foolish -- building an expensive home on a fault line or a half-mile from Mt. Aetna! We often tempt fate.

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My heart goes out to those who had no place to feel secure as a child or people to feel secure with. For many children of alcoholic or drug-affected

parents, nothing may feel secure or certain. In homes where there is constant bickering or fighting, children may grow up finding everything and everybody uncertain, and thus not finding security in themselves.

Thus, we perhaps take for granted that we have a secure home where most everything is predictable, that we have a place where we can relax and feel safe. We are drawn to be deeply grateful that our lives are well ordered. Profound thanks are in order when everything is working together for good.

We should be cautioned, however, against presumption, which is a grave sin against hope. We should not presume that because we are above the high water mark this year that we will be spared the flood again next year. Instead, we should be thankful each day for the grace of that day. We can ask for another infusion of grace tomorrow, but we should be prepared for whatever uncertainty, large or small, that life will bring tomorrow. Failing to accept life on life's terms can cause anxiety and depression whereas hope takes the bite out of uncertainty.

Jesus taught his disciples to accept uncertainty as something valuable. He told them "Take nothing on your journey but a walking stick -- no food, no traveling bag, not a coin in purse" (Mark 6: 8-9). He wants his disciples to not place ultimate security in things (a warm tunic or some coins in your purse) but to find security in a well-lived, lifelong, open and trusting relationship with God.

"God is our refuge and our strength, an ever present help in distress. Therefore we fear not, though the earth be shaken and mountains plunge into the sea. . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold." (Ps 46)

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