

## *Homily for the Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time*

Whatcha' been thinkin' about?

What thoughts have kept you awake at night as you try to fall asleep?

What thoughts have been renting space in the attic of your mind?  
in the closets of your heart? in the corners of your soul?

Whatcha' been thinking' about when you're alone in the car?  
While you're grocery shopping?  
When someone's talking to you but you're not really listening?

Whatcha' been thinkin' about  
since you walked into church this morning?  
What were you thinking about as the scriptures were being proclaimed?

It's amazing where mind and memory can take us  
whether we're sitting still, alone, or even when we're very busy.

Very often, no one but the Lord knows what we're thinking about...

Our thoughts often take us to our worries, our problems,  
our disappointments and hurt, our fears and anxieties...  
past failures, worries about tomorrow...

Of course we need to ponder what troubles us,  
to think about and pray over our problems.  
That's often the way we find healing, forgiveness and growth.  
But sometimes  
our thoughts can become so deeply rooted in our difficulties,  
that we begin to think there's no way out of them.

Regardless of where our thoughts may have wandered  
during this Mass,  
we need to consider what St. Paul asked us to ponder today.

Actually, Paul told us what to think about!

He wrote,  
*Think about these things.*  
*Think about whatever is true, whatever is honorable,*  
*whatever is just, whatever is pure,*  
*whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious...*  
*if there is anything worthy of praise,*  
*think about these things...*  
*and then the God of peace will be with you...*

Of course, the God of peace is with us in our troubled thoughts as well,  
but if we live only in our troubles,  
we may begin to imagine, even to believe, that's all there is.

If we think only about, look only at our problems,  
our troubles may be all we find.

St. Paul is offering us something much more than that.

- Regardless of how I might have been hurt by lies and injustice,  
I also have things true and honorable to ponder in my own life,  
in the lives of those around me and in my faith.  
I may need to search those things out and think on them:  
they're there -- and they're there for me... and there for you...

- In spite of how soiled might be my own life  
or the world around me, there is the purity of true beauty to enjoy,  
the innocence of children to wonder at,  
the glory of nature all around me;  
and the diverse loveliness of all the human beings  
whose paths cross mine, day after day.

And there is the purity and beauty of God  
whose hands reach out to take mine,  
whose arms never fail to embrace and hold me.

I may need to look up, out of my problems, to experience all this,  
but it's there, and it's there for each one of us...

- I may stumble and fall and make a complete mess of my life  
and yet I have the graciousness of God to reflect on:  
the Lord, ever ready to forgive, to help me up,  
to help me begin again to walk with him.

I may need to forgive myself my own failings and that may be difficult,  
but the forgiving mercy of God is always within my reach,  
just there...

- My troubles might wear me down, harden my heart and burn me out  
but the gift of God's love is always before me, behind me, within me,  
and more than worthy of my praise and gratitude.

In a world of lies and corruption,  
of injustices, of coarse and immodest sham,  
gifts of excellence will need to be sought out, found and treasured.

Like the vineyards in today's scriptures,  
such gifts will need tender care and nurturing

if we hope to be sustained by them.

St. Paul also told us today, "Have no anxiety at all..."

If that seems impossible, as it often seems to me,  
then find in your day, in your week, in your heart  
a small vineyard of what is good and true,  
what is pure and beautiful, what is praiseworthy:  
find that small vineyard and visit there often...

And bring your troubles there with you  
for the One who tends the vineyard wants to prune away  
what might weaken and waste our spirit.

The vineyard the Lord tends in our hearts  
is the vineyard he asks us, his people,  
to nurture and tend in the world around us.

Come to that vineyard in your heart -- as you came here today.  
Certainly we all came here with our own troubles,  
but we also came  
- to ponder a word that is true  
- to drink in what is gracious and beautiful in our prayer  
and to offer thanks for what is worthy of our praise;  
- to find the peace of God  
that surpasses all our troubles and all our understanding.

We came to this vineyard of people at prayer  
where the Lord welcomes us to his table  
to share the harvest he brought in  
through the gift of his love for us on the Cross.

Come to this table, then, and receive the sacrament  
that will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*