

Love overcomes fear

The great Scripture scholar, the late Father Raymond Brown, also had a sense of humor. He once noted: “Every time an angel shows up in Scripture, the first thing that angel says is: ‘Do not be afraid.’ Maybe angels aren’t quite as lovely as we think they are!”

We are reminded of that again and again in this Advent pre-Christmas season. When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, his first words are “Do not be afraid.” When the angel appears to Joseph, again, “Do not be afraid.” When the angel choirs appear to the shepherds, they begin “Fear not!” The one thing Jesus is quoted as saying more than anything else in the Gospels is “Do not be afraid!”

While there is something instinctual and primitive about fear that protects us, far too often fear limits us. What great things might we have done if we had not been afraid?

And you could certainly make the case that, behind every act of violence or aggression, there is some kind of fear. Mother Teresa traced the roots of abortion to fear: “Abortion is nothing but the fear of the child. The fear of having to feed one more child, to have to educate one more child, to have to love one more child.”

In my experience of counseling with women who have had abortions the fears were real – abandonment by boy friend, or spouse, and even family and friends. As one woman put it, “If just one person had told me not to do it, I would never have aborted my baby.”

The cure for fear is profound compassion for others and for ourselves. The only antidote for fear is love.

Allow me to quote a Hazelden meditation on fear.

It begins, “Love is infinite. We can’t use it up, but we can be blind to its presence. When we are scared and lonely, it’s hard to see or feel the healing love that surrounds us and protects us.

"Fear pulls a film over our eyes, which keeps us from seeing who we are. Fear would have us believe that we are merely a body. Fear says there is no God. We are all alone and there is not enough love in the world to go around.

"Fear is wrong. We are so much more than our bodies and our personalities. We are also spirit. And each of us is capable of generating oceans of love. All we have to do is to recognize that we are plugged into the source of unlimited love. And, because love expands, the more we extend love, more love there is to share. So, we shouldn't be stingy. We can use as much love as we possibly can today and still be adding to the love that exists in the world."

The meditation concludes, "Today I imagine love in the form of a golden white light. I am filled with this light and radiate it wherever I go."

Advent is the season of love overcoming fear. Mary is told not to be afraid to have a child outside of marriage, a child conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, but a conception surely not understood by all her family and neighbors. And Joseph is told not to be afraid to marry Mary, instead of participating in stoning her, or "putting her away quietly." And the shepherds are told not to be afraid to look for God born in a lowly manger.

Our fears limit us. Love expands us.

Years ago a lady shared her deep pain that she had been born of an incestuous relationship. I replied simply, "It was the wrong route, but the right person showed up!" She had spent her life rejecting herself. Shame leads us to reject ourselves. Fear leads us to reject others.

But the angels of Advent invite us to let go of the limits of fear and darkness and to embrace the light. God is light and love. Shame and fear are only shadows that vanish in God's presence.