

Dear Friends,

A mother took her little baby to the doctor. "He won't stop crying," she told him. The doctor looked at her and replied, "All the Jewish babies are crying now." The year was 1944 and German tanks were rolling into Budapest, Hungary. The anxiety gripping mothers was contagious and causing their little children to live in fear as well. Fearing for her child, the mother later gave him away to a stranger to look after for a month. This event caused the child to feel that he had been totally abandoned. As things turned out, mother and child survived and in 1956, they made a new life in Canada. The child grew up and became a teacher, then a family doctor and then a psychologist. He became familiar with human pain and suffering, both in his patients and also in his own life and behaviors. He began to understand the root cause of our addictions in our suffering and in our attempts to overcome that suffering. Understanding trauma became his life's great work. Trauma is not the event that occurs in our life but what happens to us inside as a result of that event.

An old man now, this doctor is the Hungarian-Canadian psychologist Gabor Mate. He has shared his knowledge and understanding in books and lectures and in online videos, helping us to understand better the meaning of the addictions, and of our struggles to be simply human. His teaching echoes the words of Jesus today: "Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear."

"Do not be afraid" is a frequent and consoling saying on the lips of Jesus. He says these words to us because we are often afraid. We fear the unknown. We fear what we cannot control. We fear to have arguments with people. We fear losing their approval or their love. We fear illness and disease. We fear what tomorrow may bring. We fear death. There are so many things in this world to fear.

Simply being told not to be afraid does not sound like a remedy for our fear, but the Lord gives us a great reason not to be afraid. Someone is watching over you. Someone knows you very well and loves you for yourself. Jesus is telling us that we are not abandoned children. We are greatly loved by God, who is our Father. Our strength is in God our Father, and we are his children.

In his own life Jesus attracted opposition and eventually hostility. Because of his confidence in God his Father, he did not fear his opponents. He felt confident to stand his ground. It was only when his enemies closed in on him, in the garden of Gethsemane, that he felt fear, the fear of the physical torment he was about to meet. His sweat fell like drops of blood. Luke's Gospel tells us that in that moment an angel was sent to comfort him, to strengthen him and to recharge his resolve. John's Gospel tells us that when the soldiers came, Jesus asked them, "Who are you looking for?" From that moment his fear subsided and his self-awareness returned as he stood before Pilate and his court for trial.

If we are loved in life we have every reason not to be afraid, for love drives out fear. Our attachment to those who love us – parents, husband, wife, children, relatives and friends – gives us the warmth that scatters the cold. In our turn it becomes our vocation to free others from the fears that threaten them. Many of those fears are deeply buried inside people, unseen by us yet robbing them of peace. It is in our power, the power of God's love, to pray for one another and by our kind-heartedness to help people not to be afraid.

Your friend in Jesus

Msgr. Zach