

One of the things I've seen over the years in my spiritual and life journey are two things that have at times taken on a bigger role than they should have, namely a desire to have something (tangible or intangible) that I thought would bring fulfillment, and also a tendency to over think certain things that as a result has produced some undue anxiety.

For instance, I can think of a lot of things that I wanted so bad at various points. Some of them were material things, like a video game system, a computer, a camera, or a car, or more money. Other times they were the things that would just be achievements or milestones in life; to be a little older and on my own; to be finished with school; to be a priest; to be a pastor; to be in a better parish situation. And many of these things I did obtain in life, but the thing of it is is none of them were able to bring fulfillment that was ever-lasting. And indeed, many of them had their own sets of problems too; material things need replacing; and the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Other times, there has been fear. I remember back in about 1981, I got into a pool for the first time. It really wasn't that big of a deal to swim, but at the time as a little guy, all I saw was a lot of water which was quite scary, and it took time to let go of the side of the pool and venture out. There was fear of riding a bike with two wheels; fear of the unknown; fear of rejection; fear and stress even in becoming a priest and then pastor of what people might think of my liturgical style, preaching, or how to handle things like administration or issues with saying "no" or even personnel matters. Fear can certainly loom large at times.

But the danger in life is if our hearts get focused on these two things, they won't ultimately give us rest from the storms of life. Only God can do that. And that doesn't mean that the storm necessarily goes away, or that another one won't come. But it does mean that we will make it through the storm.

Some years ago, Karen Kilby, an author, found herself at a point where she had found paradise. Or so she thought.

As she sipped her morning cup of coffee, she felt the warmth of the Florida sun, and was looking forward to sinking her toes into the sugar white sands of the beach and never leave again. But as she took the last sip of her coffee, the doorbell rang. Her husband, David, stood at the front door cradling a large box in his arms. The company car was not with him though.

He came in, put his box on the floor, overflowing with everything from his office, and told his wife he had been let go, along with four others on his staff.

Needless to say, Karen was shocked. They had just moved from Michigan to Sarasota when David had been recruited to be Vice President of Franchising. Now that was all gone.

Four months went by without promise of a new job. No matter how many resumes David mailed out, no one seemed to need a vice president. The reserve in savings was

quickly dwindling. "Don't worry, we'll manage," he kept saying, trying to reassure his wife. When the pastor of their church came to extend a helping hand, he continued to say "We'll manage, there are things we can sell to meet our obligations." The pastor though saw through the pride in David's voice, and gently responded to him, "When you get to Aunt Tillie's antiques, stop. God does not intend for you to sell everything you have. Our Benevolence Fund is there to help you." Karen knew it was hard for her husband to accept help from anyone, as he had always been the one to give it. Now though he had to learn what it meant to receive it.

When their son Michael emptied his bank account to cover a month's rent, Karen realized they could no longer postpone telling their landlords. They had leased their home for a year until they retired the following summer and weren't sure now what they'd do.

David called them, but their response was immediately that they should not think of moving out, and that they knew David would get another job and could pay them then. Karen could hardly believe it, for they weren't close to the couple, they only met them for the first time when the lease was signed. But they continued to reassure David and Karen, and Karen says at that moment, they could feel God's reassurance that it would be alright. She felt He had hand-picked this place of refuge for them months before.

Long walks on the beach continued to help David and Karen keep God's perspective. The waves softly lapping at their feet seemed to whisper, "don't worry, don't worry." Karen writes that the display of His brilliant sunsets sinking into the tranquil waters of the Gulf constantly reminded them of His glory and power. For just as He controlled the ebb and flow of the tides, they knew that everything in their lives was still under His control.

More months went by, and still no job offers. Karen's work at a real estate office helped, but it couldn't keep up with all the bills other than food and gas. Her heart ached for her husband, because she knew he wanted to be the good provider he had always been, and so she prayed "Dear God, help me to be sensitive to David's feelings and his emotional needs." She knew David was drawing his strength from God, and she wanted to be a positive influence on him. Their devotion to one another was deeper than ever before.

One morning they awoke to the sounds of a storm hurling the waves against the nearby beach. When it was over, they decided to take a walk to view the damage. As they walked, they saw their landlords from Chicago. They hadn't told them they were in town as they didn't want them to feel bad about being in their home; so their landlords said they were renting a condo on the beach and house sitting for friends. Again, Karen was blown away by their kindness, for how could such kindness be extended to them from people they hardly knew.

David had at that point been out of work for 10 months and the lease was soon terminating. Soon they'd not have a place to live.

One morning as she prayed, it occurred to her that she could check on rentals through the real estate office. Out of curiosity, she began to look at 2 bedroom condos, knowing they could manage with a smaller living space. She found a listing for a condo facing the Gulf of Mexico. Karen was drawn by the beauty of the waters, as they seemed to be a visual manifestation of God's promise of peace. She thought of the Psalm, "take your delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." Give me courage. It wouldn't hurt to try.

Not knowing how they could pull it together, they went to see the condo. Yes it had a Gulf view. But it also had shades of royal blue, lime green and shocking pink carpeting, outdated wallpaper and worn printed drapes that greeted them as they walked in. Karen's perfectionist nature and eye for decorating made her flinch as she took in her surroundings. Yet she realized it would accommodate them. And perhaps the landlord would let them replace the carpeting, drapes and wallpaper in lieu of six months rent and no deposit. The realtor thought it quite odd but she made the offer.

Time was running out, as it was just a few short weeks before moving day. But then God's answer came. First, David was offered a job with a franchise company based in Atlanta. Because they needed him to represent the company in the field, they could stay in Florida. Then, the frustrated realtor gave David the opportunity to negotiate with the landlord. They got a 3-year lease with no increase, no deposit and 6 months free rent in exchange for decorating the condo just the way they wanted it.

As Karen and David settled in to enjoy the magnificent view of the Gulf, their hearts overflowed with thanksgiving and gratitude. Not only did God meet their needs, He gave them their hearts desire. Karen knew, He was their provider, and the ultimate landlord.

And for us, the question is through the storms of life, who is our provider or landlord? Where do we look for fulfillment, and what do we do when anxiety can creep in?

In our first reading, we meet a man who knows who is in charge of his life, Elijah. His name literally means "Yahweh is God." He's devoted to God and his mission that God has given him, which hasn't been easy. He's called out the king, and drawn the ire of the queen Jezebel who was seeking his life causing him to go on the lamb. In this reading, he's come to Mount Horeb, another name for Mount Sinai. It was here Moses received the 10 commandments. And in this story, we hear all of these things that are seemingly very powerful. The strong and heavy wind that crushes the rocks; the earthquake; and fire. All things that would get our attention. But perhaps if you look at this a bit symbolically, these things could be the seemingly powerful things in life. Money has a lot of power. Our careers have a lot of power. Having power or authority over others seemingly can make us quite powerful. So can being a mover and shaker or popular person. You can think of the fire, wind and earthquake as the powerful things in the world, but note that in the story, God isn't in these things. He is in a tiny whispering sound. It takes work to hear God through these other things. But because of his virtue, Elijah can comprehend God's voice and discern by giving himself over to God. The danger in the world can be that this voice is drowned out due to secularism, where we

surrender to the louder noises if you will; pleasure, power, money a career. It's up to us to do what Karen did and discern the voice of God and trust in him as the one whom we ultimately serve. As I've said before, it does not mean that we can't live the good life or have these things, but when we are serving them or making them our god, we have a problem.

Elijah also has to overcome his fears. He was commissioned to be God's spokesman, and he actually defeats the prophets of Baal in another story in Kings. But he doesn't see victory; instead when he runs from Jezebel, he initially asks God to take his life because he feels like he is a terrible prophet. He ends up feeling sorry for himself, and as a result ends up at Mount Horeb in a cave. But it's here he finds God. He says he's been working his heart out all for nothing, and seems to think the situation is bad. But because he trusts in God, God sees him through. God listens, and tells him to have courage. The same is true in the Gospel. The disciples on a boat, symbolizing the journey of the Church, are tossed about. It's the fourth watch of the night, about 3 a.m. They are so afraid at first they don't realize Jesus is there. Peter does recognize our Lord at first, but then he begins to sink when he takes his eyes off of Jesus, who then rescues him. Jesus then gets in the boat and the wind dies down. For Karen, she certainly had a lot to be afraid of - her husband losing his job, the possibility of being out of money and out of a home, but then she realized God had a plan, and He was not going to abandon her. It's worth asking ourselves in our prayer time what we fear the most. Are you afraid of losing your reputation? Your good name? Your job or money? Failing? When fear takes over we can become paralyzed by it. But when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can overcome our deepest fears. On Good Friday the worst possible thing happened, and Jesus certainly had some fear in the Garden, but He triumphed - and so will we over any fear when we have that same trust in Him that He had in the Father.

Lastly, overcoming those fears and focusing on Jesus, we must also remember God has a job for us too. You and I are prophets. Karen went on to find her calling to share her story and to write. Elijah went on to complete his mission and evangelize. So what is our role as prophets and how do we speak on behalf of God? We guide our children in faith. We guide others through our actions and example, including being present at Mass today. We respect others and deal with them fairly. We show generosity to the less fortunate. We avoid making bad decisions with what we look at on a computer. We accept the bad breaks in life. Like Elijah, we sometimes expect our mission to go smoothly and when it doesn't might think we have messed up too much to still be loved by God, or lose track of the times God has come through before in our lives. But when we have that trust in God and carry out our mission, we can do so much good for others, just like the homeowners did for Karen and David at a time they needed someone to bring them some calm.

Life isn't a bowl of cherries, and when we say "yes" to following Jesus, our problems don't go away. Indeed Jesus tells us to pick up our cross and follow Him. Not knowing where we are headed and sometimes being caught in the midst of a storm can be frightening, and sometimes it's one storm after another. But as one of my favorite

seminary professors would say in the midst of a stressful situation, in the end it will all work out. And indeed it will because God is journeying with us every step of the way, something to think about as we prepare now to welcome Him into our hearts. Let's make sure we never take our eyes off of Him, and trust that no matter what life brings us He will be there to pull us out of the water, to fill us with His love, and to help us find the way home to Him in heaven.