

Piercing the Cloud of Fear

A reflection written by a Sister of Life

We were on the phone with Brittany, a 16-year-old senior in high school who had just discovered she was pregnant. She was terrified. She couldn't bring herself to tell her mother, a devout Christian, and her father was pressuring her to "take care of it" before her mother ever found out. I could hear the panic in her voice when she said: "I'm only a child myself, how can I bring a child into the world?" No amount of promises of support, programs for single parents at the college of her dreams, or reassurances that other teens had made it before could break through the web of fear. She said: "I can't do it. I'm going to have an abortion." We talked to her about how the abortion would hurt her, how it would affect the rest of her life. This made her hesitate, but she was still paralyzed by fear and uncertainty. She said: "Now you've confused me. I don't know what I want to do anymore."

These days it seems that the news is full of nothing but bad news. For many, it feels as though a pall of fear has been cast on the world. The future is out of our control and a little bit alarming. Fear is also very much a part of the experience of many of the women we serve in the Visitation Mission. A cloud of fear can pervade every aspect of our lives, preventing us from living the way God desires us to live, in freedom and hope. But what can pierce this cloud of fear? There is only one thing. According to Scripture, "*Perfect Love casts out all fear.*" (1 Jn 4:18)

We asked Brittany if she would like to pray with us and she agreed. One of the sisters was inspired to ask her: "Would you like to lead the prayer?" In that moment, I know that the Holy Spirit came "*to the aid of our weakness*" for she did not know how to pray as she ought. (c.f. Rom 8:26). This was Brittany's prayer:

*"Heavenly Father, I thank you for waking me up this morning.
Thank you for protecting me and my baby. I know I'm going through a rough
time right now, but I know that we can do this. Please help me. In the name of
Jesus our Lord, Amen."*

It is the Holy Spirit that breaks through the crushing burden of fear. It is the Holy Spirit that allows us to see clearly, to recognize the Truth. "*For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" (Rm 8:15-16). Just as He did for Christ, the Holy

Spirit bears witness to the reality that we are beloved of the Father. *"This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* (Mt 3:17)

When we are tempted to despair or panic, we need to rest in the truth that we are beloved of the Father. It is not that we will be beloved some day if we do everything right. It is not that we were once beloved but then we messed up. We are the Father's beloved sons and daughters at this moment and every moment of our lives. This is what will help us to walk confidently in this world.

When fear starts to cloud our vision, we need the Holy Spirit to remind us of who we are. Sometimes it doesn't take more than praying a rosary, an Our Father, or a simple lifting of the heart to God. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. We can live in the freedom of the children of God, liberated from the bondage of fear. Ponder this: *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."* (Rom 8:35,37)

Father, when we feel the weight of fear closing around us, send Your Holy Spirit, Your gift of Perfect Love. Shatter the darkness and help us to know that we are Your beloved children. Help us to trust that You will provide for us, protect us, and be with us, no matter what trials may come. We ask all this in the name of Your Beloved Son, Jesus.

Amen.