

HANG LOOSE!

II Kings 4: 42-44

Ephesians 4: 1-6

John 6: 1-15

In our American culture of fast-paced living, instant gratification and high-level competition, there is no doubt that there is one expression in our daily language which we can expect to be around and in use for a good while—the expression of being "uptight". Uptight people are not necessarily neurotic people. As a matter of fact, psychologists will insist that they are quite normal. In this American culture, it seems that being "uptight" has, in fact, become quite fashionable: worrying about one's health; worrying about bills to pay; worrying about family problems; worrying about social problems; worrying about political problems; even worrying about the worries themselves!

The uptight person—the excessive "worry-bird" is the one who is enslaved by the notion that they have total control of their life-situation. They have convinced themselves that they have the ability to manage their own future. There is not doubt in their own mind that they can handle—all by themselves—whatever comes up in life, whether it is expected or not. Everything in life would be fine for them, as long as life goes the way they see it and what everybody else does meets their expectations. When life doesn't happen to go their way—when others don't turn out to be what these folk expect them to be—when situations in life occur that are not in their control, the uptight person has no recourse but to become even more tense, more frustrated and more discouraged with everything happening around them. They soon realize that they are not only uptight with themselves but also uptight with others, as well as with God.

The message from today's Scripture readings is an invitation to the Christian believer to not be uptight but to "hang loose". You see, Church, we can "hang loose" in life

- if we have placed God first and foremost in our lives, knowing that we can surrender all things to God's will and not our own.
- if we remember the fact that God is the Giver of this life—He is the only One who can help us through everything that happens in our lives.
- if we are willing to put our faith and trust in the One who gives us the strength to wake up every morning and do the things we hope to do throughout our day.
- if we work at being what God made us to be—and not try to be what anyone else wants to re-make us into being.
- if we are willing to accept ourselves just as we are, without being so unhappy with who we are that we're not willing to share ourselves (or our gifts) with others.
- if we're willing to love the other person the way God loves us: love the good, the bad and the ugly all wrapped up in the one person.
- if we can turn to Jesus and trust in him—because he is our Light in the midst

of darkness and our Shelter in the time of storm.

—if we will walk as Jesus' disciples—because he has already provided for us the way to salvation, the promise of eternal life.

The "uptight-ness" of our times can create its own private misery if we don't know how to trust in God—how to be happy with ourselves and one another—how to "hang loose" with a faith in God who has the whole world in His hands!

In all three Scripture readings for today, the invitation to "hang loose" is demonstrated in the willingness to give to God the little that we have. In the First Reading, a man comes to the prophet Elisha with only twenty barley loaves and some grain. It was the first fruits of the harvest. The prophet Elisha, the man of God, directed this individual to give his offering back to God by offering it to the people to eat. The giver of the bread could not see how such a small amount of bread could possibly feed so many people. Because it did not calculate mathematically in his own mind, he had to question if what he brought was good enough to offer. He had to wonder if he had heard the prophet right—and if the prophet really knew what he was talking about. I'm sure that he also questioned himself, thinking: "I could never get up in front of all those people and offer them this little bit that I have. What would they think about me? I would look foolish standing up before a hundred people, offering that crowd only twenty loaves of bread to eat." Obviously, he also questioned whether or not God could do anything with the little that he brought. This, Church, is what we call an "occupational hazard" in ministry, i.e. focusing on how little we are or how little we have and forgetting how big God is!

When the prophet insisted that the man do what he was asked to do—to give what he was asked to give, we see that all his questions were answered. First of all, this man discovered that he could be a giver because God had blessed him to have something which he could share with others. Secondly, this individual realized that it wasn't up to him to decide whether the gift was "good enough". God made it "good enough" when he blessed the man to have it, in the first place! Thirdly, the individual must have discovered something about himself: he wasn't so tense and uptight, so narrow in his vision, so limited in his thinking that he would refuse to do what the man of God asked him to do. Once the servant was willing to obey God's Word—once he was willing to trust God's will—once he was willing to give as God had given to him, he saw for himself how God took the little that he had and fed everyone with it. Finally, this individual saw for himself how God works. The Scripture reading says: "And when they had eaten, there was some left over, as the Lord had said." Because he was willing to "hang loose" in the Lord, this man could see all that God would do for him and with him.

In John's Gospel text, we hear about the same problem that the disciples have with Jesus feeding the crowd at hand. The Passover was near and the crowd was huge. Jesus raised a question to his disciples about how the people are to be fed. Philip insisted that there was no food and not enough money to buy food for all those who had come. He must have wondered why Jesus would ask such a question, since the answer seemed to be so obvious. He probably felt embarrassed that he felt too ill-

equipped and ill-prepared to offer Jesus a better response. He may have even wished that he was standing more to the back of the group rather than in the front, so that Jesus would have put the question to somebody else. Being caught in such a predicament, I'm sure that Philip became very uptight because he could not figure out (for himself) what he could have done with the situation at hand.

Andrew, on the other hand, was probably standing more to the back of the group and overheard Philip debating with Jesus about how to feed the crowd. While Philip debated, Andrew decided to deliver. While Philip stood there questioning himself, Andrew went through the crowd making inquiries. He went and found somebody who had something to give. He went and looked for someone who had something—anything that God might use. He went and did not hesitate to ask that somebody be willing to give whatever they had, so that everyone else could benefit. Andrew did not sit back and wait for Jesus to single him out—to call him by name—because he knew already what Jesus had called all his disciples to do. Andrew could have gotten very uptight and stood still. The young lad could have gotten very uptight and refused to come forth with his food. Because they were willing to "hang loose" in the Lord, Andrew decided to go and the lad decided to give. As a result, they saw what the Lord Jesus would do with the little they had to offer. It was Jesus who welcomed them to come forward with whatever they had. It was Jesus who received what they were willing to offer. It was Jesus who blessed the gift that they brought. It was Jesus who fed everyone with the gift of one giver. Like the man in the First Reading, they saw for themselves what happened after everyone had been fed. There was enough food left over to fill twelve baskets. Because they were willing to "hang loose" in the Lord, the disciple Andrew and the lad could see what the Lord Jesus would do for them and with them.

Today's text from the Letter to the Ephesians extends the same invitation to us, the Christian community, i.e. to "hang loose" in the Lord Jesus. The author of the letter calls us to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another lovingly." True believers in Christ do not live from day to day in tension and "uptight-ness", trying to hold back, hold down, hold in or hold on to what the Lord is asking them to give. True believers can "hang loose" in Christ

- because they are willing to have faith in God—and to know that God has faith in them.
- because they are willing to serve the Jesus who revealed to them the power of God's presence with them and working through them.
- because they are willing to trust the Spirit God gives them to live a life worthy of the calling they have received—by being humble, meek and patient with one another.
- because they never forget that, no matter what happens in life, God is, still, on the Throne.
- and not worry about tomorrow—because they know how God has blessed them in the past and continues blessing them in the present, so they don't have to worry about Who will bless them in the future.

—and be willing to recognize that they have something to give—because everything they have received already has been given to them by God's grace.
—and be willing to do what thus says the Lord, like the man who obeyed the word from the prophet Elisha. That's how he came to see that God's Word is true.
—and not hesitate to go and do what discipleship demands of us, like Andrew did, without waiting to be singled out and called on by name.
—and respond readily, like the young lad did, by offering the little that he had for whatever Jesus needs to do with it.
—and wait and see what God will do, once we are willing to do the giving.
—and be the kind of Christian community that Paul's letter calls us to be: a community of people who live a life worthy of the calling we have received.
True believers can "hang loose" in Christ by working at being humble, meek and patient
—by bearing with one another lovingly.

My dear brothers and sisters, we must know that Christ can do so much with so little, if we're just willing to make the offer. If we are willing to "hang loose" in Christ, there's no telling what miracles we will see happen right here—before our very eyes. We have the Word of God broken open for us, right here, on a regular basis. We have the Bread of Life blessed, broken and given to us, right here, on a regular basis. If we are willing to "hang loose" in Christ—to live the truth of that Word—to live in Jesus who lives in us, then we, too, will have more than enough to feed a hungry and waiting world. Let's not be uptight, Church—but let's "hang loose" in Christ Jesus! Amen.

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