

MUSHROOM INVASION

Dealing with Worries

2012

This morning as I walked through the streets of my little neighborhood, I couldn't help but notice an unusual amount of mushrooms in the front lawn of most homes. The strange thing about it is that yesterday there was none at all. I was observing this peculiar display of nature when I heard a man following me exclaim: "I've never seen so many mushrooms! They're all over the place!"

I could tell just by the sound of his voice that he was as amazed as I was at the scenery around us. I quickly glanced over my shoulder and recognized the old man with the ponytail and the red scarf.

"Hi!" I said cheerfully, stopping in my tracks to give him time to catch up with me. "I was wondering if I'd meet you again. I haven't seen you in a while."

"Oh, you can't get rid of me that easily!" he replied smiling and a little out of breath. "Do you mind if I join you for a little bit?"

"No, not at all. I'd be glad to have your company."

"Great!...I was thinking about these mushrooms..."

"I'm guessing you know a thing or two about them, right?" I interjected.

He smiled. "I can't say that I'm an expert but I read a bit about them. They're some type of fungus. But did you know that all species of mushrooms take several days to form? I was surprised to learn this characteristic about them. I always thought they grew overnight like these ones! Quite a sight, isn't it?"

"It sure is!"

He paused for a moment, rubbed his chin and kept on: "Come to think of it, they're similar to our worries, you know... In no time they can pop up and invade our mind without any warnings at all... My analogy may sound a bit out there, but does it make sense to you?"

"I must say that I'm a bit puzzled here! But judging by our conversation the other day, I can tell that you like to start a casual conversation and turn it into an introspection. Am I right?"

"I must admit it's something I particularly enjoy doing," he replied, smiling.

"That's what I thought... But to answer your question, unfortunately I have to agree with you since worries are part of my daily life... I carry them with me like 'precious stones' and God forbid I let one drop by the wayside!" I said with a faint smile. "To tell you the truth, I believe my childhood was the only time in my life I had no worries at all... Despite the fact that my mother passed away when I was three, and tuberculosis spoiled all the fun for me from the age of three to six, I don't remember worrying about anything back then... I had a father who loved me and a wonderful aunt who took care of me after the death of my mom. I just knew they had everything under control. No need to worry... I would say that worries started popping up in my life when I became a teenager. Obviously with age come more responsibilities, and common sense tells me that with more responsibilities come more worries." I sighed.

"If this is any consolation, dear lady, I've met many people like you... I don't want to pry but what is it that you most worry about?"

"Do you have time?" I said jokingly.

"All the time in the world..."

"Well, my worries revolve mostly around health, finances, future, my kids...just to name a few. And you may not believe this, but I also worry about problems that are not even mine!.. Yup! They're other people's worries but I also carry them too as if I'm Superwoman or something! As you can see, I have an acute case of "worryitis!" I sighed.

He smiled. "Despite the disease you seem to have kept your sense of humor!"

"Better to laugh than to cry about it..." I said without much enthusiasm.

"Well, you may find solace knowing that the biggest worriers - generally speaking that is - are very compassionate individuals. They have this ability to put themselves in other people's shoes and feel their sorrows and pain as if they were their very own. Unfortunately, for some of them this 'gift' can become their worst nightmare if not handled properly.

"But let me tell you, young lady, if all the fanatic worriers out there would stop and think for a minute, they would realize that the present moment is *all* they can bank on. That's it. So, why worry about the future?.. They would also realize that ninety-five percent of the time what they worry about never happens... As for the other five percent, if God is by their side, they won't be alone to deal with whatever bad may come their way. So, again, no need to worry... *'How quickly should we cease from worrying if we did but think within ourselves: What good is it? Can I undo anything by worrying? Can I change it? Can I lessen it? If minding will not mend it, then better not to mind. The moment I fret about a thing, I am its slave instead of its master.'* These are very powerful words from an old classic book, 'God's Cure for Worry' by Mark Guy Pearse. I would highly recommend it to you, dear worrier... One thing for sure is that we can't cure worry by worrying about it, wouldn't you agree?"

"You're right. I'm one of these poor souls that have to be reminded of this truth on a daily basis." I admitted shamefully.

"I must add, however, that not one individual is the same," he kept on. "Some, for instance, always display a natural positive attitude towards life in general and its challenges. For others, it's a constant struggle. The reasons may vary depending partly on their upbringing, past experiences and genes. Someone was telling me the other day that as far as he could remember, he always had a positive attitude in life, and very seldom does he worry about anything. He attributed this trait of character to his genes. Apparently, his father always radiates with optimism."

"I wish I could say the same..." I replied with envy. "Following my mother's death when I was only three, dad's grief made it very difficult for him to live a normal life... Depressed, he isolated himself from his loved ones and kept a negative attitude for many years... My aunt then came along to take care of our little family, but I can't say she was the most positive person. In retrospect, I presume my upbringing had something to do with the way I am today."

"It surely didn't help. But you can always work at acquiring a better perspective on life."

I sighed. “Easier said than done... But enough said about me. Can I ask you a personal question?”

“Sure. I don’t have anything to hide.”

“I’ve only met you twice but my first impression of you is one of serenity. Obviously you’ve got years of experience behind your belt, and you surely know a thing or two about coping with life and its challenges, but how do you do it?.. What’s your secret?..”

“Secret?.. It’s no secret... It’s out there for anyone to know!”, he declared enthusiastically.

“What do you mean?” I asked, puzzled.

“Well, let me sum it up for you in a few simple words: *complete trust in God*. Let me tell you, dear lady, this is where and how it all begins.... God created us to live a positive and fruitful life *even* through trials and challenges. However, what we need to understand is that he never intended for us to face them alone... But let’s be honest. How many times do we put God aside in our lives to eventually fail miserably?... Oftentimes when we find ourselves in deep trouble, our first reaction is to go to family and friends for help. They may be of great help and support but when situations are desperate, we have to concede they have limited power. God should always be the first one we turn to... I, myself, very well remember being in a dire situation, and where did I find the strength to go on?.. In family and friends?.. No. They were helpless in this case. It was in God...only in God did I find it...”, he said, his voice beginning to falter.

A bit concerned, I glanced at him and saw tears slowly rolling down his cheeks. *What an awkward moment this is!* I thought. But he finally regained his composure.

“Sorry about this...” he kept on. “It seems tears come more easily with age... All I want to explain here is that God has no favorites. He loves us all the same. And to anyone who knocks, he will answer. That’s his promise. To anyone believing in Him, he will give guidance, peace of mind, serenity and true happiness amid the many challenges and trials we may face... He’s our heavenly Father. We can go to Him freely and leave our burdens at his feet knowing that everything is under his control. In doing so, there’s no need for us to worry...”

“But I realize that by comparing God to a father, it may be difficult for some of us to put our trust in Him. I, myself, always had a great relationship with my earthly father to begin with, so it has never been a problem. But taking this leap of faith could be very hard for someone with an abusive or absentee father for example. However, nothing is impossible to God... I believe his love for us is greater than anything else in this world. We’re the apple of his eye, he holds us in the palm of his hands, and he will never allow anything to happen to us that we’re not equipped to handle with Him by our side. Just knowing this certainly takes a heavy load off of our shoulders, don’t you agree?”

I sighed. “You make it sound so simple... But you should know that I also believe in God, in Jesus and the Holy Spirit,” I said emphatically. “In fact, I was born and raised Catholic but in 1977 – a year I’ll never forget - God touched me in a very special way, and I finally understood that my religion and good works were not what God was really looking for. What he really wanted was to have a relationship with me. He wanted my whole heart and my acceptance of his Son and his death on the cross for my sins. And I do know without a shadow of a doubt that in my heart lives a living, risen, resurrected Jesus!.. But if I can talk the talk but don’t walk the walk, I’m missing it big time... So, I do understand what you’re saying about faith in God, thus my reason for asking myself, *why do I worry so much then?.. Where’s my faith?* I sighed.

“Oh, dear lady, don’t let your heart be troubled...” he said with tenderness in his voice. “You’re questioning your faith. Well, that’s another worry we’ll have to add to your impressive list or collection of ‘precious stones’ as you put it, won’t we?” he teased.

“Seriously though” he continued. “Faith is not based on your feelings but rather on your heart and will as you relinquish them to God. You’ve already made him part of your life years ago in accepting his plan, so never let your emotions dictate you otherwise. He will slowly but surely change you into the person he wants you to be,” he reassured me.

“Oh, I can’t tell you how often I turn to him for help... And true to his promise, he somehow gives me peace of mind... However, I must admit it’s a constant struggle and to be honest with you, I’m tired of fighting... I may sound like a drama queen when I say this, but perhaps worrying has become a little addiction of mine?..”

He frowned: “Well now, dear lady, ‘addiction’ is a very big word, don’t you think? I would rather call it a ‘habit’; an acquired pattern of behavior that has slowly but surely made itself very comfortable in your mind.”

“A habit?.. I’ve never thought of it this way, but it does make sense.”

“I’m not a certified psychologist but life thought me a few things. Let me ask you a question. On a normal day, what are your first thoughts when you wake up in the morning?”

I wondered where he was heading with his question, but taking a deep breath I replied: “Well, to tell you the truth, my brain is too foggy to think about anything... However, the first thing I do when I’m still in bed is to check the weather from my bedroom window. Then I get up, do fifteen minutes of stretching exercises, go to the bathroom and wash up a bit, head to the kitchen, pour myself a hot cup of tea, and finally end up in front of my computer to check my emails, read the news and play a couple of games of Solitaire.” Once I was done, I glanced at him with an apprehensive look, not totally convinced I gave him the response he was looking for.

He blinked. “Seriously?... One of the first things you do in the morning is to read the news?” he asked baffled. “Well, for someone having a problem with worries and with all the negative news out there, it seems you’re starting the day on the wrong foot, dear lady!”, he exclaimed.

My mouth dropped open but I made no response.

He kept on: “Don’t you think reading or listening to something uplifting would be a far better way to start your day?... You’re a Bible believer, so why not make a habit of reading a few verses every morning and then meditate on them?... You could also find good spiritual insight from inspirational books or quotes like this one which was written by Francis de Sales: *‘Do not look forward to what might happen tomorrow. The same everlasting Father, who cares for you today, will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering or give you unflinching strength to bear it. Be at peace then and put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations...’* Quite a great quote to help start your day on the right foot, don’t you think?”

“Count your blessings, dear lady, and thank God for them... Cast all your burdens upon him. Leave with him the ones you can’t handle yourself before they escalate into an insurmountable mountain of worries. Ask for his guidance in everything you do and in every decision you make. And most importantly, don’t forget that when you accepted Christ in your life, the Holy Spirit came to dwell within you giving you all the power you need to face life and its problems. It’s only a

matter of releasing that power. In resigning your own will and yielding to the Spirit of God. With motivation and consistency, you'll get over this hurdle," he assured me.

I admit I was a bit taken aback by his comments but I knew he was right. So, I left him promising myself that I would change my priorities. From now on, at the beginning of each new day God gives me, I would spend some time alone with Him. I would completely entrust my life into his care, yield my will to his Spirit, praise Him for his countless blessings and enjoy the peace of his sweet presence in my heart. I now realize I had neglected to do that for a while, but in his mercy and faithfulness he reminded me today that he's always been there, waiting patiently for my return.

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