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The Human Condition and Fear and Faith

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on AUGUST 15, 2016.

I've been thinking a lot about the human condition lately. The headlines in the news have stimulated my thinking.

The phrase *human condition* is in itself interesting. Being human is a *condition*—maybe like heart burn or asthma. It's a condition (though marvelous at times) that comes with built-in limitations.



We're human. That means we make mistakes. (Isn't that what the poet Alexander Pope said? "To err is human.") We're human. We don't know the future. We're human. We're prone to certain drives or illnesses. We're human. We're going to die. Being human means we have very little say-so over our lives. Often we are beset by circumstances beyond our control--the economy, health issues, freak accidents. Many times the only control we have is how we respond to the things beyond our control.

That's why being human can be very frightening. If we really dwelt on how vulnerable we are, we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. But even staying in bed could be dangerous. The ceiling could come crashing down upon us. Or lying around in bed could make us more susceptible to catching pneumonia! It seems to me what is needed to live lives with at least a modicum of peace, sanity, and happiness is courage. But what is the source of such courage?

The source is not ourselves. We're only human. It's not others. They're only human too. If we turn to the Bible, we find our source of courage: the God who created us and thus knows our human condition even better than we do. The Bible says this

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame, teacher, student, author, speaker, listener, friend, poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality— the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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same God loves us unconditionally, madly, tenderly, and eternally despite our limitations and failings.



The Bible is filled with stories of human beings as vulnerable, weak, and noble as we are. They were not exempt from fear. But their fear was coupled with their faith in God. This faith or trust in God made their fear bearable. Think of Moses at the Burning Bush trying to convince God to send someone else to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt. God's response to his objections was, "I'll be with you."

Think of the young girl Mary trembling before the angel Gabriel, yet trusting so much in God she was able to say "yes" to circumstances she could never have imagined. And think of Jesus terrified in the Garden of Gethsemane finding the courage to say "yes" to a horrific death because he trusted in Abba, his Father.



Faith can be a foot bridge across raging waters...

In her book, *The Preaching Life*, Barbara Brown Taylor writes about fear and faith. She describes fear as "a small cell with no air in it and no light. It is suffocating inside, and dark. There is no room to turn around inside it." She says that faith is not "a well-fluffed nest, or a well-defended castle on a high hill." Rather faith "is a rope bridge over a gorge." She points to the story of Jairus, the official whose young daughter had just died. Before tending to the tormented man's daughter,

Jesus gives Jairus the shortest sermon he ever preached: "Do not fear, only believe."

I don't know what fears you might be dealing with right now, but, since you're human, I imagine you have some. And I don't know where you are on that rope bridge over the gorge either. Perhaps you are taking your first hesitating steps onto that swaying bridge. Or maybe you're somewhere in the middle where it is sagging the most. Or perhaps you're nearing the end and you're already catching glimpses of "the other side." But wherever you are, this is my prayer for you (and for myself!): May we learn to live the human condition with faith and courage. And may we even learn to love our human condition with its limitations and gifts, its imperfections and wonders, its heartaches and joys, knowing that Jesus lives and loves it too.

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The song is "Be Not Afraid." I believe it is sung here by John Michael Talbot even though the credits say Josh Groban...



What are your thoughts on the human condition, faith, and courage?

What did you think of the song?

PS: Once again I ask for your prayers for a retreat I'm facilitating at the Marie Joseph Spiritual Center August 20 to 27 in Biddeford, Maine. The center is located right on the ocean! Afterwards I'm staying in Maine for a few days for some R&R with an SND friend in Kennebunk. This means I am taking two weeks off from writing this blog. But the next two Mondays, the 22nd and the 29th, I will post two reflections from a few years ago. I will resume with new reflections on Monday, September 5. Thank you again for reading this blog! I really appreciate you!

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Kathleen August 15, 2016 at 5:28 am



Good reminders about our human condition Sr. Melanie. The sagging bridge analogy is good one for faith. God is always with us giving us courage as we step out in faith.

Last week our area churches ran a Bible Camp for 50 children. It was a leap of faith every day.

Enjoy your time in Maine.

Kathleen

REPLY

John Hopkins August 15, 2016 at 5:43 am



Dear Sister Melannie,

Once again a thought-provoking blog. Thank you! And thank you for your concluding prayer. Barbara Brown Taylor's image of a rope bridge over a gorge really hits home. Imagine: the wind blows, our foot slips, the rope we hold is slick from the rising mist, and yet we baby-step forward, working out our salvation with "fear and trembling." I love the song! One of my favorites! I can still remember Susan Saradon (Sister Helen Prejean) singing it to Sean Penn in the movie "Dead Man Walking." It is a song of deep hope, a double-prayer that can steady that bridge! Prayers and blessings for the Maine retreat!

REPLY

Jean August 15, 2016 at 9:57 am



And we appreciate you! Thank you and enjoy your time in Maine.

REPLY

Joanne August 15, 2016 at 10:03 am



Thank you for your inspiring words and my favorite song. I will keep you in my prayers during your retreat. Enjoy the Maine coast. I live in Nova Scotia near the coast and although it can be fierce during a storm it is a beautiful place to be.

REPLY

Esther August 15, 2016 at 11:20 am



what a fitting song. My dear brother in law passed away yesterday, after a long journey of fighting cancer. The song, "Be not Afraid-come follow me, I will give you rest" is so fitting for his struggle and to bring peace to his family. Thank you Sister Melanie for these blogs. Love and Peace to you. Esther.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND August 17, 2016 at 10:27 am



My deepest sympathy to you, Ester, on the death of your brother-in-law. I will pray for him and his family. I'm glad the words of the song spoke to you today. Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Annette August 15, 2016 at 12:38 pm



Enjoy your retreat and your R and R!

REPLY

Karen August 15, 2016 at 1:29 pm



Hope that your retreat and stay in the wilds of Maine act as a welcome recharge. Thank you so much for your weekly dose of thought, comfort and hope.

REPLY

Melanie Enert August 15, 2016 at 2:53 pm



Blaring a on your trip and the retreat .
The area sounds like the perfect setting for your personal retreat of rest and

fellowship.

You constantly provide me strength and a deeper faith with each blog, and the current one most inspiring .

We need to be reminded that we are human and will make mistakes.

Thank you for that.

Melanie

Ps while you are away, I will rely on many powerful Blogs that I saved .

REPLY

Barbara August 15, 2016 at 9:40 pm



A refreshing – and comforting! – post, Sr. Melannie. Thank you.

“Be Not Afraid” is one of my favourite songs and this is a beautiful rendition ... as are the accompanying pictures.

Blessings as you gift retreatants with a week of spiritual nourishment ... and enjoy your vacation in Maine. I spent a week or two at Goose Rocks Beach (part of the Kennebunkport area) for 32 consecutive years and to me, the ocean is the greatest facet of Creation that I have ever encountered.

REPLY

Cathy August 15, 2016 at 11:11 pm



We help each other cross that bridge when we use our unique gifts to steady one another. Thank you for steadying my bridge with your thoughtful words each week, Sister Melannie. I hope you have a lovely time in Maine!

REPLY

Carol McH August 16, 2016 at 7:31 am



Thanks Melanie for reminding me that fear & faith go hand in hand. You are such a blessing! Prayer promise for your retreat. Let the sea rest & bless you!
Carol

REPLY

Rose August 16, 2016 at 10:56 am



Have a great time in Maine, Melannie! I was there for a retreat a few years ago, and also had a chance to visit Kennebunk. Nothing like falling asleep to the soothing sounds of the ocean—it was wonderful! Hope you get a room facing the ocean. Thanks again for your blog. God bless.

REPLY

Shirley Sahlfeld August 16, 2016 at 4:08 pm



Thank you Sister Melanie. Prayers for your retreat in Maine. Enjoy your special time in Maine, what a beautiful place for a little R & R.

I have been having trouble the last two Monday's being able to open and listen to the video. Always enjoy the ones you pick so hate that I am missing them.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND August 17, 2016 at 10:25 am



I'll look into this, Shirley. It might have something to do with the age of the posting on youtube. Let me know if this continues to happen for you. I don't want you to miss the songs either! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND August 17, 2016 at 10:29 am



Thank you to all of you who responded to this post. I appreciate your additions to the theme. And thank you for the prayers and wishes for the Maine retreat and for my R&R days. I'll return grateful and refreshed, I'm sure! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

carol August 17, 2016 at 1:10 pm



Enjoy Main!! You are in my prayers.

REPLY

philomena August 20, 2016 at 7:42 pm



Thank you Sister Melannie you are such a blessing to me.
I look forward to reading your messages and hearing the music.
My prayers are with you for the retreat and your deserved rest.

REPLY

Mary Fran August 20, 2016 at 7:52 pm



Dear Melannie,
Love the image of the rope bridge over the gorge. Crossed one once but never appreciated what that journey represented. Thanks...
Mary Fran

REPLY

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