

Peace Talk Series by Mary Gloria C. Njoku

In this edition of the Programme, Peace, I shall discuss the challenges of life

Life is challenging. This is very true. When we accept the challenges of life, we can work towards overcoming them. Most people fail to see this truth about life being challenging and therefore they spend most of their life and time groaning and bemoaning the enormity of the problems they are facing. If life were easy, the groaning might make sense. But knowing that just about everyone on this our planet, earth, is experiencing problems of varying degrees, one should be drawn to note that challenges and problems are part of the package that goes with life. Some of us go as far as insinuating that the problems have been uniquely designed and meted out upon them, their families, village, town, state or nation. In this way, they make the challenges look like something that is not meant for everyone.

Daily review of news or stories from varied places and people would provide enough evidence that our brothers and sisters everywhere are suffering from similar challenges. In 2 Cor 1: 3-5, St Paul writes in thanksgiving acclaiming "*Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes! He helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help those who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God. Just as we share in Christ's many sufferings, so also through Christ we share in his great help.*" This statement from the Bible and others elucidate that suffering and problems are part and parcel of human living.

The question we should be asking ourselves is whether we want to spend our lives bemoaning problems or to set about trying to overcome the problems. What legacy do we want to leave for our young ones - complaining behaviour or "I can overcome challenges" behaviour. I have examined life here on earth and have come to agree with M. Scott Peck that what we need to get the best out of life is discipline. Discipline is an important element for solving life's problems. The deterring factor in facing and solving problem is that the process tends to involve feelings of frustration, anger, sadness, grief and other emotions.

One thing we sometimes fail to understand is that the challenges of life have the capacity to elicit our hidden talents. This is because it is only after we have tried difficult things and have successfully achieved results that we discover our ability to take on such tasks. Indeed, surmounting problems call up courage, knowledge and wisdom in us which in turn helps us to grow both socially, cognitively and spiritually. Also, when we are able to view life difficulties as challenges we can overcome them and achieve balance and peace in the midst of problems. Indeed, the amount of stress we experience depends in part on how we appraise a specific problem in our lives. The extent to which we perceive problems as threatening and see them as situations we are unable to cope with determines their impact. Stress will be low when a problem is perceived as challenging rather than threatening or when a person feels confident of his/her ability to cope with the situation.

The psychology of living fulfilled life in the midst of the problems of life is hinged on the spiritual and cognitive interpretations we give to the difficulties we encounter. Supposing Ada and Ulunma are both experiencing difficulty finding employment. If Ada believes that the problem with finding a job is connected to punishment from God or that someone in her village has prepared juju to prevent her from getting a job. If Ada is also unable to find comfort in God, her situation will seem hopeless and helpless to her. If she starts feeling hopeless and helpless, she will be less likely to put in effort into understanding what is needed to get a job and subsequently, each time she applies for a job, she may attend the interview unprepared and eventually fail to secure the job. Each time she fails, she will again attribute the failure to the same sources, punishment or juju.

Now, if Ulunma perceives her not getting a job as a common problem in the society, she might be more likely to reflect and understand that she might be competing with many excellently qualified individuals or those who have wider social networks that can support their work. If Ulunma knows this, she would put more effort into preparing herself for jobs that she applies for. If she needs to improve her information and communication technology (ICT) skills, she will do so in order to maximize her chances of getting a desired job.

From an objective consideration, when asked to estimate the possible outcomes of Ada and Ulunma, one would definitely know that Ulunma has a better prospect than Ada. First, because Ulunma sees her job hunting as a challenge that is surmountable, she would definitely work harder to improve her prospects. She might also have adequate self-esteem that would enable her to engage her job hunting exercise well and consequently have a greater likelihood of getting the job.

Further, the psychology of learning teaches us that it is through the process of encountering and solving problems that we learn. Wise people are not afraid of problems rather they welcome them and their associated emotional pain. Some of us often choose to procrastinate facing the problems, believing that they will go away. Some pretend that their problems do not exist. Some ignore their problems and some attempt to forget them. Some people engage in what we call behavioural disengagement while others turn to use of substances to numb the pain associated with the difficulties of life. Some mental health professionals consider the tendency to avoid problems and their associated emotions the cause of mental illness. According to M. Scott Peck, since most of us approach life problems in maladaptive ways, many of us do not have adequate mental health. When we avoid both the problem and the associated emotional difficulties, we miss the opportunity for mental and spiritual growth. Indeed, when we stop growing, the human spirit tends to dry up or shrink.

Let us then work towards engendering in ourselves and others the wisdom for mental and spiritual health. Let us understand the value of suffering, embracing life difficulties and associated emotional challenges, seeing our problems as challenges that are amenable to change and actually solving our problems. We need to exercise discipline and patience. We can exercise

discipline and patience by delaying our quest for immediate gratification ("quick fix"), accepting our responsibility in life, being dedicated to truth and ensuring that we attain balance. We must remember that the problems associated with life give us the opportunity to grow. If you want to grow, accept the problems you have, grumble less and make effort to solve them. You will discover that you will be at peace even in the midst of enormous challenges.

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.