

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

The Gospel reading for today could be summed in one sentence, “Don’t be anxious about the things of this life.” Jesus is teaching that throughout the reading and really there are some quite harsh words in the reading as well. Being anxious is antithetical to faith. Or to put it as Jesus said, “O you of little faith.”

The temptation of your sinful flesh when confronted by this statement of Jesus is to put up the defenses in one of two ways. The first is a bit more pious and tries to think that what you are worrying and anxious about is far more important than things like clothes, food, or shelter. You think, “well, of course, that’s just plain silly to worry about those things. I am concerned about though, my family, my job, and our country. Clearly this is good and godly.” True enough, it is good to be concerned about those things and to be an active participant in the vocations God places you in but to be anxious is another matter. To be anxious about these things is to place their care into the frail hands of creatures rather than the Creator. It’s to try and take the upholding of creation and the things of this world into our own hands and think we are the ones who not simply have control of them but somehow, we can, by our worry and anxiety, make some sort of difference. Jesus said, “And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” At what point in your life, did being anxious add one benefit to anything or anyone?

Now, the church is not immune to this either. We do it in the church as well. The low hanging fruit to attack is when we think about budgets and finances. It’s that time of year for us again and for us at St. John’s the expenses are increasing. We worry and we are anxious about the future and how will things ever move forward. This doesn’t happen just with the congregation; pastors do it too. The devil likes to attack pastors as not only are they connected to the church just like other members but their livelihood and that of their families are intermixed in it as well. The church worries and is tempted to forget who she is and what God has called her to do and really whose church it is, it belongs to Jesus.

The second more crass way is to try and distance ourselves from God in a way that sees Jesus as disconnected with our lives. We try to defend our anxiousness and worry in that we rationalize Jesus doesn’t care about us when we do face lack, suffering, hardship, and loss. The sinful flesh thinks if the command of Jesus to not be anxious comes from the Lord, then the Lord must not understand our life or not care about us.

So, what about all this? What is Jesus saying? Let the text speak for itself. Listen again to what Jesus said, ““Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

Jesus is pointing out something about us, he’s showing there is idolatry in our hearts. Being anxious about life is worshiping a false god, it’s a sin against the First Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” Just as every commandment comes back to the first, “you shall have no other gods,” being anxious about life and in life shows our sinful old man and the fact that we really don’t fear, love, and trust in God above all things. If we really did fear, love, and trust in God above all things and at all times we wouldn’t be anxious, we wouldn’t worry, and we would always seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

When you worry, when you are anxious, you are called to repent. Jesus calls you to repent. Jesus gives you a way of examining yourselves in the Gospel reading that knocks you back into God's reality when you find yourselves being anxious and worrying. Listen again to what Jesus teaches you, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

Pay attention to what Jesus says to you in those words. There's a line of thinking, so to speak, from the lesser to the greater in all this that humbles you and comforts too. When you worry and are anxious it's ridiculous and almost laughable. Birds are frail creatures. They can fly right into your window and die because they mistook it for a flight path through your house unless you don't clean your windows and they are too dirty to see through. They also don't have a job to go to, and they don't have all the bills, obligations, and various other things that go along with life in this world. They eat, they fly, and they lay eggs. Or look at flowers and how beautiful a field of lilies is. They grow into beautiful sights for you and then wither away and die or are plowed over. As rich as a person may be, or the resources he may have at his disposal he can't make himself simply grow into such a beautiful sight, yet he isn't like those flowers which is alive today and tomorrow thrown into the fire.

You think highly of yourselves and low of God when you doubt that God will take care of you when the things of this creation are taken care of, and they will one day pass away. You will not pass away, and Jesus didn't come down from heaven and become a sparrow or lily. He took on human flesh. He is fully God and fully man. Failure to see, recognize, believe, and live this out in your lives is what God is getting at today in this reading and why he says, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." There's enough to do for today that you don't need to borrow trouble, for sure, and don't be anxious because do you honestly, I mean honestly, believe that God is going to take care of these things like birds and flowers around you and not take care of you? If that's what you think, then, yes, you are indeed of little faith. All of us need to repent.

Here's the thing, though. God does care for you because he loves you in Christ and has redeemed you. Even those times when it may appear God isn't taking care of you, he still is, you might just not see it or realize it. You are of more value than the birds of the air and the flowers of the field. See Jesus, he is the Son of God, the Word made flesh. God has got some skin in the game of your life. He's created you; he's redeemed you, and he still takes care of you. Remember what you call God because you belong to Christ? You call God, "Father." The Almighty God who has no beginning and no end and created all things by his word is the God, who you call "Father." That means something and it's significant for your life every day.

As a baptized child of God, you view the world differently. You see, hear, think, and live in this world differently as a Christian. You view it as one who calls God "Father" because he really is and as your Father, he takes care of you. He gives you daily bread, he guards and keeps you in his care, and he has given you a promised inheritance of eternal joy and peace because in Christ, you are his sons and daughters.

Those are the promises God makes to you even as he says, "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." When he makes that statement to you, he backs it up with the promise and certainty that he will care for you even unto everlasting life. How do you know this? Christ has died for you. Christ is risen from the dead. You are baptized into Christ. This is most certainly true.

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Now listen to that instruction Jesus teaches you, “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” Strive for that in your new life in Christ. Live what Jesus teaches you as his people. “Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.” Jesus really means what he says here to you. He’s not simply saying, “evaluate and change your priorities.” He is calling you to a new heart and mind. It’s a new life and way of life; one lived by someone who belongs in a Kingdom somewhere else and is lasting and to someone else who is eternal.

The beauty then in all of this is that you are of great value to God. Called by name in Holy Baptism you know the Lord who is the Maker of heaven and earth and who has redeemed you by the blood of Christ. That changes everything, then. It fixes your eyes on Christ crucified for you and sees this world in and through him. It knows that God will not let you be put shame as you trust in him. Does this mean, then, you should be reckless and not good stewards of what God has given to you? No, but it takes the anxiety and worry out of the things of this world and puts the focus on where it should be even as you are good stewards. Living your life seeking first him and his kingdom means you will not lack what you need. It means sometimes you will have to sacrifice but you sacrifice knowing the Lord will take care of you and give you what you need as you seek to serve him faithfully and trust in him all the way. It doesn’t mean you will have everything you want; there’s a difference and we Americans confuse these things. Will you suffer? At times. Will there be times in your life when your old sinful man, the world, and the devil will try to get you to doubt that God really does care for you and takes care of you? Absolutely these things will happen, but you will be given all things as you seek Christ, his kingdom, and his righteousness. Jesus says you will, and his word isn’t like the birds of the air or the grass and lilies of the field. Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

And you’re not alone in this either. God has gathered you together into his Holy Church. You bear one another’s burdens as the body of Christ. You gladly do good to one another as the household of faith. You “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another.” This too is part of God’s care for you as you are united in the fellowship that is the church created and sustained by the Holy Spirit through the word and sacraments. Seek those things in your life. Put those things first and do so together as the body of Christ, the Church. Conform your life in this way.

Dear saints of God, you belong to Christ. He is yours and you are his. Though the earth give way, though the heavens be moved your inheritance is Zion, the Holy dwelling of God and his people. Cling to Jesus and know you will be taken care of in this life and even into life everlasting. This is your confidence in Jesus for you. And so, as God’s people cling to him and pray for his return. Until that day, go running to his word and sacraments and find healing, refreshment, and life. Lay down your head tonight trusting in Christ who has done all things well and rise tomorrow in that same grace which is yours in your Baptism. In all times and circumstances, give him thanks and pray “O Lord, we implore You, let Your continual pity cleanse and defend Your Church; and because she cannot continue in safety without Your aid, preserve her evermore by Your help and goodness.”

As you leave this place today too, know what your future holds and what your Lord places before you. The day is coming, your Lord promises you, when you will be raised to immortality and incorruption, and you will see him face to face. On that day, the eternal day, there will no longer be any anxiousness or worry. All false gods will be no more and instead you will live with your Lord and all his saints in that new creation that is beyond compare which he has prepared for you. That will be a good and beautiful sight the Lord will give you which is not tainted by sin and for you dear children of great value to your heavenly Father as he clothes you in far more splendor than any earthly king could have ever imagined. This is the Kingdom of God and his righteousness which is yours now and will be forever.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.