Tr15(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*"Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself."*

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 This Gospel passage from St. Matthew comes from the close of the Sermon on the Mount. Some writers have joked that because Jesus mentions the word "anxious" six times in this passage today might aptly be nicknamed "anxiety Sunday". (But since most folks deal with plenty of stress during the week we will refrain from that.) A nice counter would be Psalm 48: "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest; for it is thou, LORD, only, that makest me dwell in safety."

 Now fear can be found in all animals. We may have seen a dog quivering or whimpering. But anxiety is unique to humans. According to Webster's it is “uneasiness about a contingency”.

 Anxiety is definitely a by-product of mammon, an uncommon word which Jesus used. In the early days of Israel mammon meant something, such as money, which one **entrusted** to another for safe keeping, not unlike a vault box or giving your car to a valet. But over time the term changed in meaning away from something which one **entrusted** to something **in** which one trusted.

 So, simply put, mammon means or represents whatever we put our trust in. (Given that money often serves as mammon to many, many folks it is more than a tad odd that our bills proclaim, "*In God We Trust*".) So whatever is our driving focus in life--unless it is God--is mammon to us whether it be possessions, family, or money. When our lives get tied up with our mammon and the pursuit of it we get stress, and anxiety flows from thinking that we may not have enough or we might lose our mammon.

 Focusing on money, I myself remember wondering in grad school about what on earth I would do with an income after graduation of even just $30,000! Needless to say I proved a bit naive.

This is due in part to the reality that as our income rises so do our longings and belongings. A Ford is no longer enough when one MUST have a BMW! (Madison avenue has a lot to do with this.)

 This is why Jesus says we can not have two masters. We can not be focused on or "hold to"-- the things of this earth and simultaneously be focused on--or "hold to"--spiritual or heavenly things.

They are mutually exclusive, like a married bachelor or an obese anorexic. One ends up being our passion and the other disdained. Just before talking about not having two masters, Jesus had explained to his disciples that the human eye is the light of the body and if the "light that in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

 Now possessions such as food, clothing, shelter, and money are obviously needful in this world to avoid starvation and sickness for ourselves and family. Jesus is not teaching that we should be reckless or everyone become homeless.

 As with so much of Christ's teaching it all comes down to perspective. Keeping in mind our Doxology at each Offertory praising “God from whom all blessings flow” helps keep our pursuit of needful things from consuming us and causing us to hurt others.

Faith keeps anxiety in check. In fact rabbis of Jesus day had a saying, "he who has a loaf in his basket and says, 'but what will I eat tomorrow', is a man of little faith".

 Jesus in this passage gives his listeners **five** arguments against anxiety over mammon along with two suggestions on how to change perspective. He points out that the Lord gave us the biggest gift of all--LIFE--so why wouldn't he give us lesser gifts too? When our children were young did we typically give them only one really big present or some smaller ones as well? He points out that God takes care of the lesser animals. He feeds the birds who don't sow, reap, or gather food into barns. So, similarly, if God takes care of animals inferior to us over whom we actually have stewardship, why wouldn't he take care of our food needs too? Don't the stewards of his critters need food too? These first two arguments should remind us of how Adam and Eve back in Eden turned away from trusting in God's care.

 Jesus then points out that worry won't do what everyone seems always to want to do**:** live longer. So, worry is pointless in giving us the one thing not already obtainable on earth**:** more time.

 He next points out about how beautiful the lilies of the field are which God created even though they only are beautiful for a few earthly days. By way of interest, the lilies of the field were not what we might think of as lilies. Rather, these field flowers were probably poppies. These flowers are only at their peak beauty for a day or two.

 Changing course a bit, then Jesus points out by saying, "O ye of little faith". He is hinting strongly that worry ultimately is distrust of God and pagan-like. Pagans, or what we might call non-Christians as well as agnostics & atheists who do not know God the Father to be loving and caring, can be forgiven for worrying.

After all other faiths often regard the Almighty as distant or capricious. But Christians worrying about clothing, food, and drink?? "Get real", Jesus might say today.

 These five arguments against anxiousness can be summarized as: worry is stupid when you ponder creation and the fact that no other creatures ever worry; it is also useless and possibly injurious (think ulcers), and finally it is a bit insulting to God. Jesus then suggests two viewpoints which can begin to eliminate anxiety.

 He recommends that we try to focus on seeking or **concentrating** on the kingdom of God. We may all have noticed that at some point in our lives something new appeared which totally overhauled our focus in life. Maybe it was falling love or finally finding the career, the vocation, one was meant to do.

Such loves can drive other activities or distractions right out of the picture. Worries just evaporate as we are energized and focus on this new drive in our life. Focusing on God and the kingdom of heaven can be that focus which simplifies our life and washes away worry or transforms our job into our career and our calling!

 We can start doing this in little ways. We can begin by **thanking** God a lot more often than just before dinner. By thanking him for another day as our feet come out of bed or by thanking him for our PB&J or countless other little things during the moments of each day we become aware of our dependency upon him. (The Jews historically even had little thank you prayers to recite after using the restroom.) This will reinforce our memory of how **all** of nature depends upon and is cared for by Him.

 Next Jesus points out that worry can be eliminated by living one day at a time. If we stop looking for possible future problems, each day can be lived as it comes. This should not discourage ever planning or budgeting, elsewhere Jesus notes that no king goes to war without counting his troops first. No, to live without any planning means a life of constant crisis management.

 But, by keeping in mind, for example, that one could die at any time, such as by getting hit by a car backing out of a stall, each day becomes more unique and able to be enjoyed as a day of life. And given that worries often do not actually come to be, to use an expression I learned from my wife: **don’t** pay interest before it is due. So again**:** perspective.

 We can begin to start living each day as unique and thus reduce our stress about the future also by remembering all the specific, not just general such as each new morn, specific good things God has done for us, especially recently. Hadn't I been REALLY worried about running out of money in August or getting fired, or audited, or that my grandchild might have a bad condition or illness? And hey, nothing happened! Remembering actual specific blessings, especially ones recent in our memory, will decrease our uneasiness about "contingencies" which, again, how Webster's defines anxiety.

 To summarize: Jesus tells his listeners that they can't have lives driven by both heavenly and earthly concerns. He suggests that anxiety, the by-product of "holding to" to mammon ultimately is silly given the reality of nature; it is bad for our health, and insulting to God.

He suggests two related remedies to avoid "laying up treasure" upon earth: the first is to let God and heaven become the driving force in our life, like falling in love. We can begin this by learning our dependency upon God by thanking Him copiously each day for lots of **little** blessings. Secondly, we can decrease our uneasiness about contingencies down the road by remembering recent **big** blessings which did occur.

 Before turning it at night we might do well to remember that it is all a-okay to cast all our worries upon God because he cares for you, as St. Peter wrote. We should remember that "not one sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge" and that "all of our hairs are counted", as St. Matthew wrote. And, if certain thoughts--other than a guilty conscience--trouble us we may want to recall what the great 20th Century Italian mystic and stigmatist St. Padre Pio wrote: "If certain thoughts bother you, it is the devil who causes you to worry, and not God, Who, being the spirit of peace, grants you tranquility."

 And so, borrowing this prayer for trustfulness from p. 596 of our PBs let us pray: "O most loving Father, who willest us to give thanks for all things, to dread nothing but the loss of thee, and to cast all our care on thee, who carest for us; Preserve us from faithless fears and worldly anxieties, and grant that no clouds of this mortal life may hide from us the light of that love which is immortal, and which thou hast manifested unto us in thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. +