

Cycle A Homily
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 6:24-34
February 26-27, 2011

These past few weeks we've been hearing Gospel accounts taken from the Book of Matthew that are from Christ's Sermon on the Mount. The main purpose of this section of Matthew's Gospel is to teach followers of Jesus how they are to live.

We've certainly heard some formidable challenges.

In last weekend's Gospel, Jesus challenges us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors. We certainly realize we can't even begin to do this without God's help.

Today's Gospel presents the challenge to avoid worrying, to trust in God's providential care. You heard Jesus say don't worry about what you will eat or drink or wear because God will take care of you.

What? Don't worry? Isn't life nothing but worry?

Imagine if we were to read today's Gospel to two groups of people. The first group to whom we proclaim the Gospel is our friends who have jobs, automobiles, and places to live. The second group to whom we proclaim the Gospel is the thousands of people in Haiti who have been living in refugee camps for over thirteen months now.

If we were to proclaim this Gospel to both groups, several things might happen.

First, those of us who are blessed with food, shelter, and many good things in life might be challenged to realize how very blessed we are. Maybe we'd realize that we spend too much time and too excessive energy worrying about acquiring more. This realization should lead us to embrace the truth that we did not get all these things on our own. God made it possible. And maybe we'd embrace the truth that God doesn't give us so much just for our own sakes. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers. How important it is to go beyond the limited thinking that was so common during biblical times.

So many people during biblical times assumed if one had what they needed, they were totally good, and if one was needy it was because they were totally evil. It is so important to avoid the kind of thinking!

What is the truth here? The rich are not rich only because they are good. During biblical times, many believed that the rich were the only ones favored by God. But Jesus tries to open our eyes to reality. There are plenty of examples of wealthy people who gained what they have by being greedy or treating others unjustly. There are also examples of wealthy people who are very, very generous. That was true two thousand years ago. It is true today, too.

Also, during biblical times many people assumed that the needy were being punished by God. It's not fair to condemn the needy or to look at a group of people afflicted by disasters and say that God punished them for something wrong they did.

The author Kay Sylvester describes this so well when she wrote: **“There is no magical formula, such as “Do these 10 good things for others and get an equivalent number of blessings. Fail to do good things and get nothing. Do bad things and bad things come to you.” That’s not the economy of God; that’s a limited perception of virtue and value .”** (But even today, we encounter people who think along those lines.)

So, what is Jesus telling us in today's Gospel? What is He telling those who already have much? Might He be reminding us that God's grace and mercy come through us on their way to those in deepest need? That gives us an awesome responsibility, the responsibility to be channels of God's care and love for God's people.

The basic message of the Gospel is that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Our trust must not be centered in the things we have, but in the God who provides and keeps saying to us, “Look beyond the boundaries of yourself.”

Will we ever get rid of all of our needless worries? Will we ever eliminate all of our anxieties in this life? Isn't it fair to say that we are creatures who are so anxious so often? If we had nothing to worry about, would we worry about that?

Today's Gospel invites us to point in the right direction. And that direction is to let God empower us moment by moment. God promised never to abandon us. He promised never to withdraw His love from us. He wants to break down the walls of destructive anxiety that turns us in on ourselves.

The advice of Jesus to take life one day at a time can be among the most valuable words of advice we ever hear, **if** we pray for the grace to let these words permeate our hearts. May God bless us with an abiding trust in His love, a love that shares, a love that must be passed on if we are to enable it to grow.