

Homily for the 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Many of you have heard of the church bulletin bloopers before. They're the one-liners full of misprints and malapropisms like: "Eight new choir robes are currently needed, due to the addition of several new members and to the deterioration of some older ones" *and* "Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at church. Come hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa." But I think one of my favorites is probably: "Don't let worry kill you – let the church help."

You know, by fallen human nature we are prone to be anxious or worried about many things in life. Take your pick, there's plenty we could worry about – we all have our favorites. And in our Gospel today, Jesus confronts us with some of the most common worries. They center around our need to be able to provide for our basic material needs: for food and drink, for clothing, and for security for tomorrow. And at first glance, it seems a pretty logical response to be worried about such things if they're lacking, because without them we can't survive.

However, it's what Jesus has to say right before this in today's Gospel that is so important to understand about why we shouldn't worry – even about these life essentials. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

That word “mammon”, in case you’re wondering, is an Aramaic word that literally means “wealth”. Now, Jesus is not condemning wealth here. Nor is He saying that we shouldn’t work to earn our daily bread or to make provisions for our future. Rather, mammon is used to mean “that which is pursued and valued to the point of idolatry and so separates the possessor from God.” So, what Jesus is saying is we can only have one Lord of our lives – God or something else.

Then, Jesus gives examples of what that something else could be, as I mentioned above. He starts off with worrying about our lives. Now, we all need to eat and drink to live. But, how many people are so worried in our society about their lives – fretting over their health – only eating organic this or that, or taking so many supplements out the wazoo. Now, there’s nothing objectively wrong with eating organic or taking supplements, just like there’s nothing objectively wrong with wealth – actually, wealth can be a blessing for someone’s family and for those less fortunate that are helped by it. However, living your life by worrying about what you eat or drink is really not living free at all. And the life and health you think you are extending are really restrained and curtailed. For, as Jesus says, “Is not life more than food”? Of course it is! And actually by being a servant to physical health, one reduces the focus on that which is most important – spiritual health, because eternal life is forever!

Then, Jesus uses the example of birds to teach the next part of the lesson. Birds don't plant or harvest crops. They don't store a surplus of food in barns. And yet our Father in heaven makes sure they have enough to eat. And then Jesus draws a comparison: But are you not more important to God than these little birds? Of course we are! As human beings, we're at the pinnacle of creation – created in God's image and likeness – created very good! Therefore, will God not take care of our needs? Will He let us starve or die of thirst? Well, what about people in Third World Countries, then? Does God not love them since so many do not have sufficient food or drink? That's to miss the point – because if we're really living for God and not for ourselves, and He is the Lord of our lives, then God will inspire us to give nourishment to the poor through the means He's blessed us with.

The point is, who do we put our trust in God or ourselves? To really have faith in God means that we surrender to Him exactly that which we are tempted to worry about – literally turn it over to Him. But, it's not just about “giving it to God”. It's even more about trusting that God will absolutely provide a way for whatever situation is at hand. But, of course, so many of us try to turn something over to God. But then a short while later we fret and we take it back. And we start worrying or grasping at straws, striving to do something.

If you don't want to take something back you've given to God, then you must absolutely trust that God Himself will provide for you. He'll give what's needed. He'll inspire you with what to do. He'll give the thought, the grace, or the strength you need in order to move forward.

And this is what it means to make Jesus the Lord of our lives. Really, trusting – perhaps without even understanding how – that God will truly, truly provide for what we need. This is real faith. And this is the type of faith that God desires – faith that trusts Him enough to work for good in our lives, instead of us panicking, freaking out, and just doing it ourselves. As Jesus says, Your heavenly Father already knows what you need. But seek **first** the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.” Let us seek God together first. God bless you.