

Thanksgiving Homily

Matthew 6:25-33

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We gather this evening to celebrate as a community of faith, to give thanks to God for all of the wonderful things in our lives. And so, as I was preparing for this homily, I was a bit taken aback by the gospel lesson for this evening.

What I mean is this, I would rather expect all of our lessons from the Scriptures this evening to be laudatory, effusive, enthusiastic recitations of all the reasons we have to be thankful to God for all the wonderful things he has done in our lives, all the ways that he has blessed and enriched us. For isn't that the essence of Thanksgiving? Isn't that the reason why we gather either as families around the dinner

table on Thursday or as a congregation in the sanctuary on Sunday evening, to remember all of the things we have to be thankful for? Isn't this the time to pause to remember and recount our blessings?

Well of course it is! But instead of some flowery platitudes about how blessed our lives are, Jesus confronts us with an admonition not to worry. Instead of encouraging words from Jesus about thankfulness we're confronted by these words from Jesus, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body." Not what we might expect on such a night is this, is it?

These words were first spoken by Jesus in the sermon he gave his disciples, in what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount. It seems to me that worry is part of

our makeup as human beings. Worrying is what we do.

Worrying is one of our most natural responses to the environment around us.

The people in first century Palestine, the people to whom Jesus was speaking directly, legitimately had a lot to worry about. It was entirely reasonable for them to worry about food. Hunger was a daily reality for many of them. They were living as a people in servitude to a brutal, greedy, occupying empire who were far more interested in taking as much as they could from this conquered people and far less interested in that people's welfare. Not only that, but it would be fair to add the uncertainties of nature: weather, illness, disease, death to their list of things to worry about.

The people did Jesus was talking to in his sermon are so different from you and me, are they? Now granted, we don't

have the same list of worries they did. After all, we live in a land whose watchword is freedom. We get to choose our leaders, they aren't chosen for us at the point of a sword.

We have so much food to eat that obesity is an epidemic, we have so much food to eat that we throw away about 25% of it.

We have medicines, and cures, and treatments, for just about any and every ailment you can think of. Several dread diseases have been eradicated from our country, and some have even been eradicated from the whole earth.

Smallpox, scarlet fever, bubonic plague, and polio either have been eradicated or are at the point of eradication.

But we do have our own sets of worries, don't we? We have an enemy who, though small in size, is very powerful in its ability to strike terror into our hearts and to virtually paralyze our nation with fear.

Contrary to what a cursory, superficial reading of this text might lead one to believe Jesus is saying, worrying is natural and a certain amount of worrying is actually good and beneficial. Worry serves to motivate us to do the things we need to do to survive. Worry about the future, and even worry about the present, motivate us to get up in the morning and go to work. Worry about having enough food to eat motivated the farmers in Jesus' day to plant and harvest.

Jesus is making a larger point here: we have a choice to make. We can behave as if our future is completely up to us or we can act as if God is in charge, as if God will keep his promises to care for us. We can act as if our only hope is in ourselves or we can trust that ultimately our lives are in God's hands.

What worries Jesus is the fact that worry prevents us

from recognizing the fact that God is in charge. He knows that worrying interferes with our relationship with God because we think we have complete control of our lives, and therefore we do not rely on God's grace and provision, and we do not see it when God does provide for us. Jesus worries that our attempts at self-reliance prevent us from having an attitude of gratitude towards God.

So today our call is to pause to acknowledge and give thanks that we are the beneficiaries of God's gracious provision of our needs. But beyond today our call is to develop an attitude of gratitude, a heart full of thanksgiving for our blessings. One of the best ways I know of doing that is to go to the psalms. There are psalms of lament, psalms of mourning, psalms of praise, and psalms of thanksgiving. One I recommend to you is the 136th. It starts with creation

and offers praise and thanksgiving for all of God's mighty works.

Psalm 136:1-26

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords. His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights-- His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever. ¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever.

¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever.

¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever.

¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever.

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the desert, His love endures forever.

17 who struck down great kings, His love endures forever.

18 and killed mighty kings-- His love endures forever.

19 Sihon king of the Amorites His love endures forever.

20 and Og king of Bashan-- His love endures forever.

21 and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever.

22 an inheritance to his servant Israel; His love endures forever.

23 to the One who remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever.

24 and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever.

25 and who gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.

26 Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.