



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

The Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

February 26, 2017

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

Today's Scriptures

The Gospel for this Sunday continues with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In his Gospel, Matthew organized the teachings of Jesus into five separate discourses, each with its own focus. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus focused on teaching his disciples about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God represents the salvation of God. With the arrival of the kingdom, people would no longer have to wait for the fulfillment of God's promises of salvation and new life: that salvation was made available through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus wanted his disciples to understand the lasting kingdom that he came to establish and all that would be expected of those who chose to enter it.

Today's Gospel passage begins with Jesus' declaration that no one can have two masters. The Kingdom of God is offered to all, but Jesus bluntly said that those who desire to enter it must make God's kingdom their first priority. For those who choose the kingdom, there can be no divided heart, no juggling of competing demands. Serving God must be the disciple's first priority.

Recognizing that human beings are preoccupied with the many cares of life, Jesus continued on to discuss how disciples can adopt an attitude of trust in God for all their needs. Here Jesus is not talking about the trap of seeking security in wealth and power. Instead, he acknowledges that even everyday needs can cause great anxiety, thus directing energy and attention away from one's pursuit of the Kingdom of God. Using birds and flowers, Jesus pointed to the things of nature that are sustained by their creator and reassured his disciples that their loving Father will provide for their needs. Jesus was not suggesting that people abandon all their responsibilities and trust that God will provide; he was instead stating that absolutely trusting God for one's needs will bring peace from the constant worries of everyday life. Those who are free from worry are freer to pursue God's kingdom.

Jesus urged his disciples to place all their trust in God, so that they could pursue his kingdom and his will with all their hearts. Today's First Reading offers one of the tenderest images of God, as one who can be fully trusted. Isaiah first spoke for the Israelites, beaten down and profoundly demoralized by their long captivity in Babylon. Dejected, they cried out that God had forsaken and forgotten them. Immediately in response, Isaiah replied in God's voice, reassuring them that this was impossible, asking what mother could forget the child she has brought forth and cared for? He assures them that even if a mother could forget her child, God's faithfulness towards his children will never end.

Today's Psalm rounds out the teachings on trusting God. When the psalmist puts his security in God alone, he is able to live in perfect, undisturbed peace.

Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

Reading I: Isaiah 49:14-15

I will never forget.

- We are always present to the heart of God.
- Israel has not been abandoned.
- Israel is spiritually repopulating.

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 62: 2-3, 6-7, 8-9.

Rest in God alone, my soul.

Reading II: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Christ will bring to light what is hidden in darkness.

- Corinth was a seaport melting pot of pagan cultures and moral depravity.
- Paul founded the community in AD 51 on his second missionary journey, and continued to look after it as a father.
- Paul taught not to go beyond what is written.

Gospel: Matthew 6:24-34

No one can serve two masters.

- Jesus admonishes the disciples to store up "treasures in heaven."
- Wealthy mammon, in Aramaic, can serve as a deity that people serve.
- Serve God or serve wealth.
- God provides, so don't worry.

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Blueprint for the Reign of God

When I lived among impoverished people in Peru I was initially shocked when my neighborhood friends would go all out for a celebration of someone's birthday or baptism. They would serve food I thought they couldn't spare to guests who came to pray with them as they waked a deceased family member in the front room. Didn't they understand the need to conserve, to save for tomorrow?

Slowly I learned about a different set of values. A good party proclaims that the person we celebrated — whether alive or dead — is of incalculable value while money is only money, and more often than not it was in a spiral of devaluation. Additionally, people who live hand to mouth know too well that tomorrow is never guaranteed. You might save a few cents, but who's to assure that you'll be here tomorrow to enjoy it? Just ask the people of Haiti who survived the earthquake of 2010 and got hit with hurricane Matthew in 2016! A country that can "boast" of an entire Wikipedia entry just for its natural disasters will understand Jesus' assertion that guests can't fast while the bridegroom is with them but they'll probably shake their heads at the saying, "A penny saved is a penny earned."

Somehow poverty can teach people that when you face an unknown and uncontrollable future you should make everything possible of the moment at hand. They don't go out naked with the hopes that God will cause clothes to grow on them, but they also understand the futility of worry — it adds nothing to the quality or expanse of life and health.

There's another bit of wisdom hidden in the tendency to party in spite of poverty. That is that celebrations create community. Folks participate in one another's lives and become more and more bound to one another. The Spanish phrase "My house is your house" becomes ever more true as the whole neighborhood watches out for the kids playing on the street and everyone knows when the old man on the corner will go without dinner if somebody doesn't do something about it this afternoon.

Another thing that I learned slowly among my Peruvian friends was a recognition of God's bounty. When that elderly gentleman down the block received a dinner plate he would say "God provides." Now in my book, the provider was Señora Mendoza who had cooked and delivered the dinner, but somehow the venerable Señor Quispe knew that God was behind it all, and Señora Mendoza would agree.

Another one of those generous women once commented, "If we have an acre of corn, we mustn't harvest it all. If we did, where would the poor find food?" If that's not God's providence at work, what is?

Impoverished people who live as neighbors creating community seem to have found the blueprint for building up the reign of God. They ask, "What kind of world are we creating?" If Señor Quispe had made his home a fortress with locked gates, on the day he was too weak to provide for himself, nobody might have known, and if they had, they wouldn't have been able to get in to help.

Jesus told his followers not to worry about life, food, drink or clothes, but rather to seek the kingdom of God and its righteousness because everything else would come in its stead. It seems that the more we have, the more we tend to count on our own ability to procure and keep what we need. Are we putting more faith in IRAs, insurance policies and good locks than we do in God? The answer to that question might be found in how much we are willing to risk to help a neighbor, be that the person across the street or the refugees pleading for a place of safety now that their homes have been destroyed by warring factions over whom they have no influence. When my friend talked of leaving some corn in her little field she was teaching that if we watch out only for ourselves, poor mothers will not be able to feed their children. And like a mother, she saw every hungry child as somehow her own.

Jesus not only told his disciples to trust in God, but he also promised that those who left the security of home and family for his sake would receive a hundred times more in return. That promise comes true as we create the sort of community that can celebrate just because life is good and can share the little we have because we know it is all a gift. ~ Mary McGlone,

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