

"Full Faith"
Matthew 6:24-34

February 27, 2011

8th Sunday After the Epiphany

"I believe in God." So say we all, thinking we have faith because of that. Many people in our society say, "I believe in God." Even the devil believes in God (James 2:19). Yet they do not have faith. Too often we have equated faith with belief in the existence of God or knowing Biblical doctrines. But true Biblical faith is not just about what you believe or what you know. Biblical faith is about who or what you trust. As Jesus, in previous weeks, taught us about the complete law and about complete love, so today, in our Gospel reading, Jesus teaches us about complete faith.

How does he do it? He could teach that being anxious or worrying is a sin (which it is). When we worry, we violate the 1st Commandment: "You shall have no other gods." The catechism tells us that this means, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." When we worry, we are not trusting God above all things. We are trusting something or someone (usually ourselves) more than we trust God. Jesus could rebuke us for our sin and tell us to trust God more.

But Jesus doesn't do that. After re-stating the truth of the 1st Commandment, "You cannot serve God and money (or anything else)", Jesus teaches us what it means to fear, love, and trust in God above all things by using a method which was very common among the rabbis of His day: He asks questions. With five questions, Jesus teaches us about full faith.

"Therefore I tell you," Jesus says, "do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on." Then here comes the first question: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Jesus is not talking about more possessions in life than just food and clothing. In fact, in this whole section, Jesus is talking about the necessities of life, not luxuries and desires.

Rather, the answer implied by the way Jesus asks the question is, "Yes, there is more to life than food and clothing." It is as the old slogan from the Lutheran television series, *This Is The Life*, said it, "There is more to life than just being alive." Life is more than food and drink. God created us

to be more than consumers of natural resources. He created us to be in relationship with Him. God gave us life intended to last eternally.

Sin has destroyed what God intended life to be. In the Fall, Eve was tempted by the devil to doubt the Word of God and to focus her attention on herself and her desires. They stopped trusting God and started trusting themselves. She and her husband began thinking more about what they would eat than they had before. Part of the reason she chose the forbidden fruit was because it looked better and tasted better than what she had before. For the first time, humans concerned themselves with clothes. After sinning, they clothed themselves with fig leaves.

Jesus came into this world, not to feed us and clothe us and provide for all of our physical needs, but to take our sin from us and bear it to a cross. There, He endured God's righteous anger and just punishment against it so that we might be forgiven and fitted for life above and beyond simply the physical. He rose from the grave and came from death to life so that He might give us that life beyond physical needs and beyond the grave. When we focus our attention on all that is ours in Christ Jesus in the world to come, our anxiety about the needs of this world diminishes.

Yet, being truly human, we still need the things of this life. So Jesus points us to two things which don't worry at all, yet are fully taken care of by our Heavenly Father: birds and flowers. Birds don't work hard to get the things of this life, yet our Heaven Father feeds them. Flowers don't work hard to get the things of this life, yet our Heaven Father clothes them in beauty. So, Jesus asks two questions, "Are you not of more value than [these birds]?" and "And why are you anxious about clothing?"

God provides for the physical needs of these insignificant creatures whose lives are quickly over. Jesus' first question assumes the answer, "Yes, we *are* of more value than the birds." Why? God has created us in His image and in His likeness. We are not mere animals. We are human beings in the image of God. We have been created for eternity. Through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we have been prepared for eternity. Through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we share in His new and eternal life.

When we realize that we are more valuable than the birds and possess already the eternal life which flowers and other plants don't come close to having, our anxiety about God providing for us goes away. Paul makes the same point, using questions like Jesus did, in the book of Romans: "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31-32) If God has created us for eternity and gave his Son that we might have eternity, will he not graciously give us all the things we need for the here and now? Of course He will!

This is not to say that God simply drops His blessing from heaven on to our front lawn while we sit around, waiting to collect them, nor does it mean that we will never experience need. God involves us in the provision for our needs and the needs of others. Through the work in our vocation, God provides the things we need for this life. Also, when people are unable to work and provide for themselves, we, in our vocation as Christians, work with God to provide for their needs. Often, a lack of physical necessities is not the fault of God for not providing them, but the fault of people who have not fulfilled their God-given vocations.

In between those two questions, Jesus asks a question for those who think worrying is unavoidable or even necessary. "And which of you," Jesus says, "by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?" The answer, of course, is no one. Worrying is not only a lack of faith which makes it sinful. Worrying is a worthless work which makes it impractical. So, even if you want to worry, it's not going to do you any good.

Finally, Jesus sums up everything in his fifth and final question: "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" We see God's care of all His creatures around us (if we take the time to look) and realize that He will much more care for us. To worry that God will not care for us is to have "little faith." Faith sees God's providence, recognizes our status as redeemed children of God made in His image, and trusts Him to care for our physical needs as He already has with our eternal needs.

How does full faith do that? Full faith (not just knowledge or belief but trust) does not worry. Why not? Jesus concludes by telling His followers not to worry about the needs of this life. He gives two reasons why Christians do not worry.

First, Jesus says, “For the Gentiles seek after all these things.” To anxiously pursue after the things of this life is not something Christians do. This is something that unbelievers do. We don’t do it because we don’t need to do it. Why?

Secondly Jesus says, “Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.” We don’t have to worry about the things of this life because the One who is in control of the things of this world knows we need them and desires to give them to us.

Instead of worrying, Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” What does this mean? Often, people think this means we have to do some sort of religious activity and then God will reward us with the things we need. But that’s not it at all. To seek the kingdom of God is purely to receive. It means to go to the place where Jesus is ruling with His gracious presence. It means to receive His gifts of forgiveness and righteousness. It is to receive the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. “In seeking that Gospel, we will also experience the sustaining community of fellow disciples, who are our brothers and sisters. With them we are joined to Christ in Holy Baptism, and with them we gather to hear God’s Word and receive our Lord’s Supper.” (Gibbs, p.366). This, Jesus maintains is the whole point of life, not the pursuit of material goods. “Jesus is drawing, wooing, and inviting his disciples thus to orient their lives and so to be free from worry over life’s other needs.” (Gibbs, p.366) With faith is oriented with that purpose and that direction, the Father will supply all the other things as well.

A magazine popular back in the 1960’s and which is still around today is *Mad* magazine. Its cover was adorned with a goofy looking guy with red hair and toothy grin and the caption, “What? Me worry?” When we talk about not worrying, this is the image many people have of it – a goofy and unrealistic naivete. Worrying is considered to be a natural and necessary part of life. To not worry is to be foolish and naïve. We, as Christians, are neither foolish or naïve. We see the trouble that sin

has caused in this world. We know the One who has overcome sin through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. And we trust that the One who has rescued us for all eternity will also provide for our needs here and now, despite any shortage or temporary set back. That's not naivete. That's faith – full faith. Amen.