

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

“I want you to be free from anxieties.” That’s what St. Paul says to the congregation in Corinth (1 Cor 7:32). It’s a sentiment everyone can understand because it seems like we’re always either dealing with our own anxiety or we’re dealing with someone else’s anxiety. By any measure you can find, anxiety disorders have increased dramatically in the last fifteen years, especially among the young. You’ve seen anxiety and you’ve gone through it yourself anytime you’ve been worried about what the future might hold. Anxiety is different than fear. Fear comes when you’re afraid of a present reality, when you’re dealing with the trouble at hand. But anxiety means you’re already dealing with trouble that hasn’t arrived yet, and might not ever come.

You might justify anxiety by saying it’s responsible preparation for what’s ahead. But as you might have noticed, losing sleep at night over something you’re worried about ends up making the problem worse. It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy. You’re worried about the future, and that worry ends up producing the bad outcome you imagined. Or you end up facing what you’re scared of and realize it’s not so bad, so then you can go on worrying about the next thing. Anxiety can become crippling because it takes the focus away from present problems and solutions. It’s borrowed trouble—on interest. Anxiety divides your focus, your resources, your mind, your love, and everything about who you are. It leaves you partially in the present and partially fighting against imagined enemies. To be anxious is to divide yourself too thin by

worrying about every imagined outcome, leaving no strength to deal with the real problems in your life.

In our Gospel text this morning, which is a portion of our Lord's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses our anxiety and He ties it closely with our sinful desire for more wealth. Jesus had just taught that we ought not lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal, but that we should lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Whatever you value most, whatever you fear, love, and trust above all things, that thing is your god. If what you treasure above all is earthly wealth, pleasure, and prosperity, then your god is called Mammon. It has captured your heart and made you its slave.

And if Mammon is your god, you will always be disappointed. Wealth comes and goes. The money that's piled up in your bank account is actually worthless. Not because of interest, although there is that, but because money only has value based on what it's used for. If you never use it for anything good, then it's actually worth nothing. It's just a placeholder for what could be there. People gather more and more and they often hurt people along the way, or they neglect helping the poor, or they save up for a dream retirement that becomes dreadful because all they can do is reflect on their meaningless life. Wealth is a tricky thing. The love of money truly is the root of all kinds of evil. It can make you do some awful things and it can turn you into an awful person. With Mammon as your god, you will always end up disappointed.

Jesus emphasized again: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." You cannot trust in God and money. You can only learn to recognize money as a tool God has given you to help others. But don't make the tool into the ultimate thing, the be all

end all. Yes, it's good to be responsible with money and all the earthly treasures God has given you. This is not a call to go spend everything in irresponsible living. But there's a fine line between being responsible and being stingy. So often the stingiest miser is created through his intention of being conservative with resources. God gives everything you need at the proper time. Maybe not in your time, but at the proper time.

Jesus transitions from his teaching about money to his teaching about anxiety because the two are so closely related. "You cannot serve God and money. *Therefore I tell you*, do not be anxious about your life." We pile up money because we're anxious about the future. We want to know we have enough for the future so that we can have peace of mind right now. People save and save and save, they become stingy and miserly, they neglect the needs of others because they want to be sure to have enough for themselves. This is nothing but pure unbelief. It's a kind of self-justification. We don't trust God to take care of us. We feel we have to go it on our own and take more than we need now to have enough for later. This worry about the future is anxiety.

Of course, in our prosperous modern societies where creating wealth has become a science, who worries about food, drink, and clothing anymore? It turns out many people do, especially if living from paycheck to paycheck. But it's nothing like times past. You would think that having basic necessities would lead to a life of ease. Yet what ends up happening? The more people have, the more anxious they become about keeping what they have and getting more. They begin losing sleep at night as they worry about the future of their wealth and whether they can maintain the life they've built for themselves. Or they begin having exaggerated fear of trivial things: about how they look, about how popular they are, about what other people think of them, fear about missing out, or anxiety about nothing at all. So much anxiety today can't even be traced to a cause. It's just worry for the sake of worry because we're so divided within

ourselves. Our being is pulled in so many different directions and everything is crying out for our attention. The more our material needs and desires are met and the more we have, the more worries we seem to have.

So what can we do about all this anxiety in our lives? A tendency is to become anxious about anxiety, to get worked up about trying to deal with our worries on our own. We end up turning inside and focusing more and more on ourselves and on our problems. But Jesus points us outside of ourselves. That's the first thing you can do for anxiety. Look beyond yourself. Jesus says: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Food, drink, and clothing are tools God uses to take care of you. But you are different than those things. Even if you had absolutely nothing, praise the LORD for what He *has* given you. With Job you can learn to say: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). Or with our LORD, you can say: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The LORD gives us everything we need, and even in want He provides for us.

Jesus again points us outside of ourselves to God's marvelous creation: "Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet *your* heavenly Father feeds them. Are you of not more value than they?" Birds don't worry about the coming winter. They keep working at what God has given them to do and the LORD provides for them. The eyes of all creatures look to the LORD and He gives them their food at the proper time. He opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing. The birds don't fret about the future. They do what they're supposed to do today and they praise the LORD with a beautiful song while doing it. Look to the birds and learn from their example. Faithfully do the work God has placed in front

of you. Entrust everything to Him and He'll take care of the rest. If God will take care of the birds, He'll certainly take care of you, His children, as well.

Again with clothing, Jesus points us outside of ourselves, to creation. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." That's how God clothes the grasses of the fields and the wildflowers, which bloom for a short season and then get burned up and return to the dust in death. If that's how God clothes the plants of His creation, how much more so will He clothe you, His children. The one who preserves all creation will also see to it that you are given what you need at the right time. The plants don't toil and spin. They do what God put them there to do, to grow, to look beautiful, to produce oxygen, to prevent erosion, and to be picked and enjoyed. They receive everything from their Creator and then they declare His glories before the world. Are we any different? Does not God give us everything we need and more? What is there to worry about?

So look outside yourself to God's glorious creation if you need a sense of God's providence in your life. But also look to the redemption the LORD has given you in Jesus Christ. That's the second point. Look outside of yourself not only at creation and the physical things God gives to you. Even more so, look at the spiritual benefits He's given you. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8: "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" If God loved you so much that He became a man to die in your place on the cross, if God did everything necessary for your eternal salvation, how could He not also give you the things you need for your physical life right now?

That's what Jesus means when He says: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Seek the righteousness of Christ in the

forgiveness of sins and seek to live that righteousness everyday, doing what God has given you to do in the place He has put you. Seek first His Kingdom, and He'll see to it that you have all the resources you need. God will put things into perspective and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He'll begin to change the desires of your heart that they might align more with the will of God in your life. "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4).. Trust in the LORD with all your heart. Everything He's done for you by giving you life and by giving you new life in Jesus Christ shows you how reliable He is. Our God can be trusted because He takes care of you, temporally and eternally.

Once you've come to this understanding from God's Word, which is able to put all your anxieties into perspective, and which even starts to take your anxieties away, you are reminded that living in and from the Word of God is the answer to the anxieties of our age. God's Word is what puts your life into perspective. The issues in your life are uncovered in the Bible and then the LORD covers your shame with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He comforts you in His Word and gives you passages to lean on when anxiety begins to stew in your head. Read the Bible daily and note the comforting passages. Commit them to memory. You can start with the theme of our Gospel text today, Matthew 7:33: "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

And finally, remember that golden advice from the Apostle Peter in 1 Peter 5:6: "Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." The right perspective can diminish anxiety, but that doesn't mean all anxiety will disappear. You still live in this sinful world and you still see the effects of sin, which can be scary. But rather than dwell on your anxious thoughts and instead of mulling over all the possibilities again and again, cast your anxieties, your fears, and your worries upon the LORD Jesus Christ. He not only takes your sin, your shame, and your

sicknesses upon Himself. He also takes your anxieties upon Himself. He bore them in His body on the cross and in turn He is able to give you the peace that passes all understanding. “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble,” and even in the trouble of today, the LORD is right there with you guiding you on the way that leads to eternal life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Creed.