

February 26, 2017
8th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 6:24-34

[Jesus said to the disciples] 24 "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.

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat (or drink), or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? 27 Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? 28 Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. 29 But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. 30 If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' 32 All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom (of God) and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. 34 Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.



Background

At the time when Jesus lived, it was not uncommon for families to have servants. When the patriarch of the family died, he might leave one servant to two different sons. That servant had to divide his time and allegiance between both sons. This was not an easy task and would make Jesus' teaching very interesting for the people of the day. When Jesus talks about loving one master and hating the other, he is not speaking of the affectionate kind of love which comes to mind when most westerners hear the word. Jesus would have used the term "love" as an expression of attachment or loyalty.

In the second part of the gospel Jesus also used examples that would relate to both the men and the women who would have heard him teaching. The Aramaic word for birds is masculine, and the work that Jesus refers to with birds in his teaching, sowing, reaping, and gathering would have been the tasks of the men in his day. The word for lilies of the field is feminine, and the tasks Jesus associates with the lilies, spinning and making clothes were the tasks of women of the day. Without embarrassing anyone, Jesus makes his point and he exhorts them to trust in God to care for them, both the men and the women. The vast majority of the people were peasants who lived from day to day. They experienced on a daily basis a God who provided for them, and they also saw many whose basic needs were not provided for. They would have heard Jesus' words of reassurance and his call to trust in the goodness of God from a much different life experience than many of us do.

Reflection Questions

1. Where in your life are you trying to live two different sets of values or expectations?
2. What are the different groups that expect your loyalty?
3. Have there been times when you had a strong sense of God's care for you?
4. Have you ever chosen to walk with another who was in a stressful period of their life? Why did you make that decision? What happened to you because of that decision?

5. Have there also been times when you felt a great sense of worry or dread? What helped you to move on past those feelings?
6. What are the things you that you worry about? What are the things you do not let yourself worry about?
7. When was the last time you put a problem or situation into God's hands? What happened?
8. How do you think the homeless, immigrants, and chronically under-employed hear Jesus' statement of reassurance?
9. As you hear this gospel today, what stirs inside of you? How might God be acting in that response? What would you like to say to God as you become aware of your response to this gospel?

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.

