

## DO NOT WORRY

Joel 2. 21-27  
1 Timothy 2. 1-7  
Matthew 6. 25-33

I speak to you † in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

In the passage that precedes our gospel text this morning, our Lord has been teaching about the uselessness of treasuring anything besides God himself and all that he offers us. In some Bible translations, the first verse of our reading begins with the word ‘Therefore’; and so it would appear to be a conclusion to that teaching.

In several ways, Jesus has just illustrated the impossibility of putting both God and earthly treasures at the centre of our lives. And since this is not possible, our Lord tells his listeners: ‘don’t worry.’ He wishes to address the frustration that his listeners (and we) experience when we put too much value on earthly treasures and try to serve God at the same time.

Our Lord’s listeners lived in an insecure world. Most of them had only the bare essentials of life, and many of them were dependent on the weather and the soil to sustain their crops. They were keenly aware of this dependence, as were the pagans around them, who worshipped the sun, the rain, and the rivers in hopes of securing a good harvest each year.

It was this insecurity that led people to be anxious. What if there isn’t enough rain this year? What if the crops are diseased? What if I can’t provide food for my family? There were no guarantees in life, and people were painfully reminded of that fact all the time. This anxiety tempted many of Jesus’ listeners to concentrate mainly on obtaining material comforts, rather than serving God. Money was concrete; material comforts could be seen; they could be used in the here and now. They therefore

seemed to offer security against the capriciousness of life. When one sees the anxiety that our Lord's contemporaries faced in an inconstant world, one can better understand the importance they placed on material security.

Our Lord understood this underlying anxiety too; and in this passage he makes several points to help his listeners. Firstly, Jesus asks them to consider the truth that life is more than just food and clothing. By asking the question, he hopes that they will take a moment to think about what life is really all about. If they (or we) have reduced our lives to the accumulation of things – even basic things that seem to be necessary – then we are missing out on life in its deepest and truest sense.

Secondly, Jesus tells his listeners that worrying about things won't help a bit. 'Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?' His listeners knew this of course, just as we do; but if we are honest, even this knowledge does not keep us from being anxious sometimes.

Thirdly, using the birds of the air and the lilies of the field as examples, our Lord provides an effective antidote to anxiety; and this antidote is a reliance on the benevolent character of our heavenly Father. Our Father, Jesus says, is the one who sustains and takes care of his creation. God our Father has a direct interest in, and takes direct action in the lives of the creatures he has made. The point that our Lord is making is that if our Father is this involved and good to *the rest* of his creation, then how *much more* will he be involved with us, who are his children? He concludes his comments by saying, 'Are you not of more value than they?' And by asking, 'will he not much more clothe you, you of little faith?'

I personally had the privilege of discovering the reliability of our heavenly Father years ago, in 1979. As many of you know, prior to my ordination, I had a career in business; and in 1979, I had just obtained an MBA from Columbia University in New

York. I had a great job waiting for me in Paris; but two circumstances prevented me from starting that job as planned. The first circumstance was the unexpected death of my mother, which obliged me to remain for a certain period of time in the country (I was the executor of her estate).

The second (and happier) circumstance was the fact that I had met Claudia. And having met her shortly after receiving news that I had been given the job in Paris, I somehow felt that I should stay in New York, at least for a while. I felt led to pursue this relationship; I wanted to see if it would be a significant one for both of us.

Amazingly, my employer in Paris was very understanding, and said that the company was willing to give me some extra time in New York to get things sorted. They would keep my job for me.

The problem was that I had finished my academic work at Columbia, and needed a short-time job to tide me over, so that I could stay in New York, deal with my mother's estate, and concentrate on getting to know Claudia better. I applied for a number of positions; but employers were hesitant to take me on, knowing of my plans to go to Paris.

I was staying in a flat that a friend had lent me on a short-term basis; and I remember very clearly that morning when I got up, looked at the bedside table, and realised that I had exactly two dollars and fifty cents (that is, approximately 1 pound fifty in sterling) left to my name. I prayed and said, 'Lord, today would be a very good day to have news about a job. I have nothing, but I am going to leave that to you. I am now going to go downstairs and spend one dollar of this remaining money on breakfast.' And I did.

When I returned to the flat after breakfast, the phone rang. It was the head of a consulting firm to which I had applied the previous week. The man said to me, 'Mr Moore, I have some good news, and some bad news.' I said, 'Well, give me the good news first.' He replied, 'The good news is that we would like to offer you a job. The bad news is that you have to start tomorrow.'

That day in New York City, I learnt afresh that our lives are truly in the hands of God; and that in seeking his kingdom, and in seeking to live in and abide in him, we can trust that he remains our caring, active Father. It is not that we are guaranteed that we will never be in want; or that we will be without worldly financial security because we are Christians. Our true security is not in our circumstances. It is not in our ability to get and keep a good job, or to obtain food and clothing for ourselves. Our true security is in our heavenly Father. If we lose our jobs, or if we face uncertainty about our present or future needs, we are called to continue to seek the kingdom of God; because our fundamental security, and the reality of where we go to receive what we need, has not changed.

As we seek the kingdom of our Father, we will continue to remain under his care. We are freed to live in the present moment and to leave the future in his hands. We are called to live in the knowledge that we are the children of God, and to believe that He is actively present in our world and in our circumstances. It is to this God, our loving and just heavenly Father, that we give grateful thanks today.

Amen.