

Readings: Is. 49: 14-15; Psalm 62; 1 Cor. 4:1-5; Matt 6:24-34]

Some years ago I read the following in a business magazine: Stress management experts say that only two percent of our "worrying time" is spent on things that might actually be helped by worrying. The figures below illustrate how the other 98 percent of this time is spent: 40% on things that never happen 35% on things that can't be changed 15% on things that turn out better than expected 8% on useless, petty worries.

And don't you find that the stuff we worried about today somehow took care of themselves?

At the end of the day, I lie in bed and realize that all the drama I had built up in my mind and in my heart was needless; everything turned out OK. Maybe not how I had wanted or expected it, but as God wanted it and expected it to turn out. It was that kind of imagined drama that caused my heart problems. Not my lifestyle, it was my faith-style. Not trusting enough in God.

Given the difficulties of daily life, the advice that Jesus gives us in the Gospel today not to worry may seem naïve and even insensitive. However, the first people to hear this message were, for the most part, even more financially disadvantaged than most of us. So we are challenged to look deeper.

Jesus does not deny that there are basic human needs that must be met if one is to enjoy even a little bit of peace. Rather, Jesus invites us to adjust our priorities. Will God be the One Who guides and blesses our lives? Or will money and the pursuit of money and material things become our God? What more proof do we need of the truthfulness of the words of Jesus today?

The other truth is found in these words from today's Gospel: "Do not worry about your life." "Can any of you, by worrying, add a single moment to your life span?" In one of my commentaries I read this week, I found out that the author of the book, "Don't Sweat the Details" died of a massive heart attack at age 46 from the stresses of his life. That's called "irony." Worry does not add to the quality and the length of our lives – it subtracts and detracts from it!

I have to confess to you that I worry too much. I let little things become big things. I worry about what I've done and what I've failed to do -- more than you do. Trust me. I worry about the workload piling up on my desk. I worry about the people depending on me for prayers and help.

I worry about personal failings that botch up my relationships: the short word to a tender soul or the unanswered phone call that prolongs the heartache.

Yet Jesus doesn't offer His teaching to make us anxious. In fact it's meant to do the opposite: It's a lesson in trust. Don't worry about life, food, clothes, health, and stuff! Jesus says. The antidote to fear is faith. If worry is a problem, then the solution is to fix our attention elsewhere. Seek the Kingdom.

These three words could save your soul and mine a lot of heartache:

Seek the Kingdom. Tomorrow's in God's hands. So is yesterday. What needs to be forgiven is already forgiven. What needs to be healed will be healed.

All that belongs to us is today. All we have to do today is seek the Kingdom. It's a simple thing but no small thing. It's quite grand, as Saint Paul puts it, to be the stewards of God's mysteries.

Do you know what word Paul uses for "steward?" *Hyperetes*. This word originally described the oarsmen on the lower level of a ship's galley. St. Paul reminds us that Christ is the Captain of the Ship, the Church. We move together in synch when we pull the oars correctly.

As stewards, we can move through the miracle that is today, full of authority to recreate the world around us. Free to make responsible choices, to bring about positive changes. Free to be kind, to forgive, to bear joy within us and to give others a reason to share it. If we seek the Kingdom, we find that everything we need is already within us.

Stewardship will be the theme of my homilies during this upcoming season of Lent, which begins this Wednesday with Ash Wednesday. We will walk together as we explore what stewardship means, how it applies to our prayer life, our family life, our time, our talent and our treasure.

As we enter Lent this week, I want to propose three activities that correspond to the traditional three disciplines of Lent: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

Prayer: I especially want to invite everyone to Monday Evening Prayer during the Mondays of Lent at 7:00 PM. The church environment is one of prayerful silence, the other-worldliness of our prayer, song and incense rising to the rafters of the church. Please join us! If you cannot join us in person, how about going to iBreviary and pray with us when you can. Spoiler alert: “Lauds” is Morning Prayer and “Vespers” is Evening Prayer. Know that whether you pray with us in church or privately at home or at work or school, you are praying with “all the saints” in your Catholic Church!

Fasting: In addition to the dietary discipline, how about fasting from gossip, complaining, negativity and rash judgement? I’ll bet the Lord and His Heavenly Father would find this kind of fasting more satisfactory than denying ourselves caffeine, cola, candies and desserts!

Almsgiving: Pray for open ears, an open mind, and open heart to learn how Jesus Christ is calling us to be His stewards. Take the money you would normally spend on treats and add it to our collection for the poor.

Have you ever talked to someone who has been unemployed for an extended period? Worry and anxiety about tomorrow is intense. To those situations Jesus says: Do not worry about your life. Do not toil unless for the kingdom of God. Do not worry about what to eat, what to drink, or what to wear. Do not worry about your life. God remembers you, knows you, and brings light into your darkness. Trust in God and be confident in the life God has given you.

Gratitude is what comes from our soul when we are freed from worry. Seek first the kingdom of God. That is what disciples need to do. The rest, as Jesus says, will take care of itself. Seek the Kingdom. And say “Thank you!” Come to this Eucharist, this “Thanksgiving Meal.” And find food and strength and hope for our Lenten journey and beyond! AMEN!