

Jesus says to you, "Do not be anxious. Don't worry." What do you say to Him?

Do you say, "Well, Lord, it's not that simple. You don't know what I've been going through. There are so many terrible things going on in the world. I just can't help it."

Jesus says to you, "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on." What do you say to that?

Do you say, "Yeah, Lord, that sounds very spiritual and everything, but I've got to put food on the table and clothe my family!" Or do you say, "How can I not be anxious about life when I just received this diagnosis or when my loved one is in declining health, or they live far away, where I can't help them?"

When Jesus starts telling his disciples "Do not worry," do you start to tune Him out? For so many of us, the idea of being free from anxiety is a beautiful thought, but so far from reality that we don't even take it seriously. That's a shame, because our Lord Jesus clearly intends for us to do something other than worry ourselves sick. And let's be as clear as possible. Jesus is talking about crippling worry; a mental loop that drives us to distraction; one of the words Jesus uses to describe this worry means "to be suspended in the air"—literally, to live in suspense—a fear of what's going to happen next. Jesus is NOT saying, don't be concerned about yourself or your neighbor. Compassion and caring go hand in hand. Jesus is saying that worry is a fear of the future that will rupture your life, and he does not want that for his followers.

What does He intend for us? He lays it all out in today's Gospel lesson. First of all, Jesus calls us consciously reject worldly priorities. He does this first by saying, "life is more than food, and the body more than clothing."

Now sitting in church we may piously agree with that principle, but in our everyday lives, do our actions match our agreement? Have we consciously rejected "getting more stuff" as something that matters to us, or are we still on the treadmill of going after more, bigger, and better? In addition to being a meaningless goal, it brings with it many worries, to the point that we stop possessing our possessions and they start possessing us. Worry is neutralized when you consciously reject the thought that "getting more stuff" is going to make you happy. That takes some doing, especially when so much advertising is based on creating a desire in you for something you don't have. That's why Jesus doesn't just say, "reject this mindset," but continues by saying "replace it with something better."

But before we get to that "something better," Jesus pauses and asks us to reflect on His Father and our Father. Jesus asks us to think about the birds that fly around our backyards and the flowers beautify the landscape. God tends to them both. Neither birds nor flowers worry about their existence, yet God provides for them. And if that is the case, Jesus says, don't you think that God is going to tend to you, as well? You are much more valuable to God than a bird, Jesus says, and that's not a put-down to birds. It's just that God values you more; so much so that His Son

was raised up on a cross to take your punishment. He didn't do that for the birds or the flowers; he did that for you and for me, so we could be forgiven; so that we would trust Him with our eternal well-being, along with everything else.

That is the choice Jesus holds before you today. You can worry, or you can trust God. You can torture yourself with a thousand "what ifs," or you can place your problem in the hands of the God who formed this world and still tends to it. You can worry yourself sick, or you can enjoy a healthy trust in your Father to do what is best for you. You are invited today to trust that God knows what is best for you, and is working through every little detail of your life, to provide for you and put you on the path that will bring the most blessing to you. That doesn't mean the most stuff; but that does mean freedom from the agony of anxiety. Trust that your Heavenly Father knows what to do and will never leave you. Let go of the illusion that your worry is going to change anything. It's not. Trust that God has it handled and that He loves you and that His answers are the best answers. They are. The sacrifice of His Son on the cross is proof of how far He would go to care for you.

And when you trust in the Lord, you are ready to replace old ways of thinking with something much better. Listen to Jesus describe that "better way": "Do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you."

Seeking the kingdom of God, Jesus says, is the better way to live. Seeking the kingdom of God is, first of all, an invitation to remember. It is an invitation to remember the way that your Father has ordered your steps throughout your life. It is an invitation to remember all that Jesus willingly did for you in His Passion, Death and Resurrection. And it is an invitation to remember your identity in Christ. You are a royal servant of the King—and as such, He will not withhold from you the blessings of His kingdom. That doesn't mean that you will never be grieved or concerned or troubled. But it does mean that your focus and strength can be the reign of God and his righteousness which has come into our world in Jesus himself.

Seeking the kingdom means living in a way that shows the reality of Jesus in your life. It means knowing what He says in His Word. It means valuing what He does for you here in His church. It means adopting God's priorities as the priorities that you will live by. It means giving freely from what you have and who you are in response to Jesus' kindness. Seeking God's kingdom means that you are sold on Jesus Christ and want to bring his compassion and mercy and truth into your corner of the world. Jesus promised that when going after His kingdom is your first priority, you will lack nothing. You'll have nothing to worry about. Try it and see.