

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Quinquagesima Sunday
February 26, 2017

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Our Lord Jesus says “Take no thought for the morrow.” He is not providing the opening pitch for your insurance agent or stock broker! Nor is Jesus giving a lesson on economics. Yes, there are examples here about food and clothing and shelter. But the Divine definition of “necessities of life” is all about the *holiness* and *goodness* of God, and the harsh and unavoidable fact of the prevalence of evil.

The Lord begins by saying we cannot serve God and mammon. Dual citizenship isn't in the cards. *Both* God and mammon reject the very thought. Therefore we must renounce not only the anxious pursuit of wealth but also anxiety over present needs. These things divide the heart. Mammon can argue for itself. Our focus is on the Lord. Almighty God will not reign in a divided heart. *Period*. Full stop!

The central idea of the Lord's teaching here is freedom from anxiety. Just so we get the point Jesus kept repeating the Greek word *μεριμνα*, (*marimna*.) It means **preoccupation**. You see it is verse 25, 27, 28, 31, and 34. **Preoccupation**. Anxiety is not the same thing as prudent concern for which provision is to be made. Our Lord gives examples from the realm of nature. Birds and flowers certainly make prudent provision. Jesus does not condemn them. Right now it is the squirrels in my backyard that are rediscovering the nuts and seeds they buried last fall before the barrier of snow turned to ice and froze ground hard. That was certainly making provision for later. And because of the recent mild weather we see again the birds who knew when to head south to avoid the severity of the New England winter. Ornithologists tell us birds bulk up before they migrate. Again, that is planning ahead. So from the fact you are Christian it does not follow you cancel your homeowners' insurance!

Our Lord Jesus isn't condemning prudence, to the relief of both your insurance agent and broker. The Lord is only attacking *worry*. And worry is a *human* failing. The birds and squirrels aren't worried. They don't fret and get in a stew over the coming of winter. They just make provision for their wellbeing and get on with it. Man alone of all creation is conscious of a heavenly Father Who cares for him, and of his own rank in the created order. And yet God Incarnate has to teach us “Be not therefore anxious.”

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Divine Providence is always at work. And Divine Providence is *deliberate*. It is not capricious or fickle. There is no favoritism or spitefulness. God is a universal Father with equal and loving care for *all* His children. And the Beloved Son Who knows the Father best taught us that God's care for all in no way diminishes His care for each. The Lord memorably said of those birds, "one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father."

No people have more cause for anxiety or are in more need of the gospel good news than the disciples in a persecuted Church. The apostolic age was that church. That church also included Christians in Soviet Russia and Communist China, and in the near east today. So this lesson of the Divine providence overriding the anxiety of human life is a strength and support to many people. It isn't just for those who have too much money left at the end of the month! St Peter could encourage his fellows: "Cast all your anxiety upon Him, for He careth for you." (*1 Peter* v.7) And St Paul exhorted the Philippians "In nothing be anxious." (*Phil* iv.6) Christians facing the possibility of gladiators or lions in the arena needed the gospel good news. So do Catholics when terrorists enter Sunday mass with sub-machine guns.

In Our Lord's time, as now, babies die in childbirth, crops fail, there is a growing disparity between rich and poor, earthquakes happen, and there is religiously-motivated political violence. Yet Jesus never set Himself up as a reformer. What He did was ask people to look beyond the tragedies that were their daily fare and find more goodness in God's world than they found evil. There is nothing Pollyanna about that viewpoint. Christians are the people who live with the blinkers off!

Evil is not God's design. Evil is the result of *man's* rebellion. God's providence allows a certain daily measure of difficulty. You do not need me to tell you that! Yet the Lord says far more serious is *anxiety*, which insults the providence and love of the Father. So the Lord counsels us not to add to the difficulties of life by being anxious.

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God may lengthen or shorten our lives as He pleases or allows. He may embitter or sweeten them as He knows is working our salvation. But Christ assured us “I have come that ye may have life, and have it more abundantly. That abundant life we cannot have without Him. And His desire is that we remain in His Good Hands.