



THIRD SUNDAY OF MATTHEW JULY 3

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 6:22-33

[Trusting God Wholly]

The Lord said, "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."



THE SERMON

Jesus had gone up to a mountain to teach His people. As the true and ultimate Prophet, the Son of God, like a new Moses, gathers the multitude to give the New Law, the Law of Love. He begins His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5) and then explains how we should live. We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, keeping in our hearts the commandments of God so that we may be transformed from the inside out. The Lord teaches us to love our enemies and how to pray [the Lord's Prayer] (Matthew 6:9-13), fast, and have our values based on eternal matters, not temporal. He teaches us to hope for and desire the Kingdom of God so that we can trust in God as His children, and never be anxious for anything.

The Lord tells us, "The eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22)." The eye is like the door that lets the light in, so we can see. Our eyes gaze at that which they deeply desire. The Lord is teaching us here that if our "eye," that window of our souls, is good, we will be full of light. The light will not only come in but will shine from us as we become bright lamps in this world, letting our light shine before men (Matthew 5:14-16).

If our hearts desire, above all, the things of God because we love Him above all things, then our eyes will not be in darkness, but we will behold the light of God. If we seek and desire the temporary, fleeting, and even destructive elements of this world, our hearts remain in darkness. This is because light and darkness cannot exist simultaneously in the same place. As we read in the Gospel of John, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:4-5). Darkness is always cast out by light, and can never comprehend the light.

Each day we choose whom we will serve. We are called to seek the True Light – Christ Himself. The inner eye of the soul, which the Fathers of the Church call the "nous," is that which the Lord cleanses and enlightens when we draw close to Him. This is why the Lord says to us, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24)." Mammon was an ancient Aramaic word that meant "possessions," which can become idols when they take the place of God in our hearts. Wealth is not evil in itself, but it becomes a problem when it gains control over us like a master.

We can only have one lord over our lives. It will be either the Lord Jesus or something or someone else. If we seek worldly things, we will be full of darkness. More importantly, they will never satisfy us, and we can become full of anxiety and fear that we will not have enough for our needs. We become anxious to get what the world desires, and if we get them, we become anxious not to lose them. Our lives become full of anguish and exhaustion when we do not desire God above all things because then we cannot trust Him for all things.

On the other hand, if God is the true Lord of our lives, and Jesus Christ sits at the throne of our hearts, then we begin to live in the Kingdom of God. We have been created for higher, eternal goals, so that we may be united to God. Before the Fall, in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve did not have to worry about anything, and they enjoyed God's fatherly provision. Anxiety and fear came *after* the Fall. When we trust God, we begin to understand that we are His beloved children, and He, as our Father, will provide for all our needs. Therefore, the Lord tells us not to be anxious about our lives and needs, such as food and clothing. "Look at the birds of the air," He says, "they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 6:26).

Of course, we must work to nurture and clothe ourselves and our loved ones, as well as those who are struggling and in need: those without necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter. However, we do so to imitate Christ, serve and love our neighbor, and glorify God. We do not need to be anxious about earthly things. We work to make this world better as we are called to "tend and to keep it" (Genesis 2:15). We work to increase virtue in a society for the generations to come, but for each of us, our priority is Christ and our salvation.

With God's love, anxiety and fear dissipate, and we experience peace. Saint Seraphim of Sarov said, "Acquire the Spirit of Peace, and a thousand souls around you will be saved." Likewise, Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica said, "We all worry about ourselves too much and only he who leaves everything to the will of God can feel truly joyous, light, and peaceful . . . learn to ease the burden of thoughts that bears down upon us. Turn to the Lord and give our worries over to Him, as well as the worries and cares of our loved ones."

"Therefore," the Lord says, "do not be anxious . . . For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Matthew 6:32). Leaving anxiety behind requires that we consciously seek God and trust Him. Christ is asking us to set priorities, and put the spiritual values and pursuits above the material values of this life. Let us replace darkness in our lives with His light, actively seeking His kingdom and His righteousness, and He always hears us and takes care of us.

To serve Christ as our only Lord, and trust God above all else is to rest in His love, with the confidence that He will provide for all our needs. Let us follow His path of love, devotion, and honesty, and in this way, we begin to enter the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. To do so is to be full of His light, which enters through the eyes of our soul, and goes out as we become lamps in this world. Christ becomes our *everything*. His peace abides in us and flows from us to all around us. May our eyes become bright lamps shining in the world as we cast all our cares upon Him since He cares for us.