

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 2nd 2014

Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget, I will never forget you. Isaiah 49

Rest in God alone, my soul. Psalm 62

No one can serve two masters.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Matthew 6

When, in the past, I have heard Jesus' invitation to me to trust him and to not worry, there always seems to be some part of me that holds back. I never was very good at a "trust walk" - being blindfolded and letting someone just lead me around, blindly trusting I won't walk into something I couldn't see. I assume it is the very human part of us that clings to our survival instinct. In fact, when I reflect on it, worry is the way I protect myself from getting hurt, but it is also the way I look ahead, the way I foresee concerns, danger. It is the way I solve problems and imagine solutions. "What are the threats that are out there?" In fact, to not worry almost seems to be unconcerned about the things that I ought to be concerned about.

It takes me some deeper reflection to get into these readings and to hear the invitation more deeply, more personally. I don't think Jesus is telling me not to be concerned about anything, any more than Jesus is telling us not to care about paying our bills or providing for our daily needs or our future security.

The first part of the consolation comes from Isaiah 49. God's love for us compared to a mother's love for us. Of course, a mother simply always has tenderness for the child of her womb. Our God has tenderness like that for us. The power of the next life is very consoling: "Even should she forget, I will never forget you." I need to walk around in that these days and let it soak in and comfort me. The bond, the connection, the care, the tenderness of God for me is there. I need to let myself feel it more deeply.

I need to walk around these days saying the words of Psalm 62: "Rest in God alone, my soul." "He alone is my rock and my salvation. ... Trust in him at all times." Oh, how I try to rest, rely, take comfort and shelter in so many other places, in so many other places of refuge! In those places where I regress or where I protect my vulnerability, I need to say, right in that situation, "Rest in God alone, my soul. Just rest. Just let go and find comfort and care in God alone, instead of any other escape, any other pattern."

And, then I need to walk around in Jesus' challenging and clarifying message. As much as I try, I can't stay on the fence so much. I have to choose who my master, my Lord, who the ground of my being will be. I need to decide whom I will serve. The notion of "service" helps me. When I focus too much on security issues, I'm really serving a master. I'm giving service to a false god. I'm attending to something which will never really fulfill me, never bring me to the fullness of who I am called to be.

I would never say "mammon" or money or security is my "god," but I instinctively know what Jesus is saying about my needing to serve God alone.

And, then, when he asks me not to worry about all the external things, I understand the freedom to which he is calling me. He's saying, "Don't be caught up in these things. Don't let them drive your choices, and especially your anxieties." I know he is telling me that I won't be able to hear the cry of the poor and reach out to the people on the margins if I'm caught up in worry about my needs.

St. Ignatius' reflection at the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises comes to me when I read this Gospel.

God created us
to praise, reverence, and serve God
and in this way to save our souls.
God created all of the rest of creation
to help us achieve the purpose for which
God created us.

Ignatius tells us that we should therefore use those things which help us achieve the end for which we are created and that we should shun those things which get in the way of our fulfilling our purpose. He describes that freedom as "indifference" - being in balance - so that the thing that helps us decide whether we do this or that is the reason we were created.

Jesus says it so wonderfully:

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given you besides.

Dear Jesus, the only true center of my life and my choices, thank you for your tender, continually faithful love for me. I'm especially grateful for your patient love when I try to be independent and fail to depend upon you, fail to trust your care. Let me rest in you alone today. In all you call me to do today, let me surrender my anxiety. Let me be courageous and bold in my concern for sharing your love for others. Let me place my life in your hands. Let me fall into your loving embrace so that I can serve you and your people with greater freedom, without fear, with greater zeal, with greater fire. Thank you.

Andy Alexander, S.J. - Creighton University