

Our Lord says, “Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious.” Often times, anxiousness and worry come from simply looking around.

We look around in our house, and we realize all the things that are falling apart and need fixed, and we wonder when we’ll have time to do that, and we start to feel a little anxious.

Or we look at our bank statements, and we see that the money seems to be flowing out more than we’d like, while less comes in than we’d want, and we worry.

Or we look our kids and grandkids and wonder about the choices they’re making and do they really understand what they’re doing and what can we do to help them, and we get anxious. We look around, and we worry.

Yet our Lord, who loves us, would spare us this. He knows that being anxious isn’t just unpleasant, but is in fact corrosive to our very souls, as well as breaking down our relationship with Him and the eternal life He gives.

And so He delivers us from this, though not in a way we might expect. In order to free us from anxiety, our Lord makes us His servants. We are freed by being bound to Him. This might seem contrary to what we’d think, yet when we look at the world, and our lives, through the eyes of a servant of God, we find that our worry is taken away.

As our Lord Jesus teaches on worry, and in doing so gives us comfort, He directs us to look at several things, that we might see His goodness and His care for us, and therefore not worry.

The first of these is to look at the reality that we must serve someone. He says, “You cannot serve God and money.” The word there translated money in our reading is the Hebrew word “mammon.” Perhaps you’ve heard that if you remember this text from older English translations like the King James Version. Mammon includes money, but it also includes such things as possessions, prestige, lifestyle – pretty much all the things of the world. So Jesus is saying that you may either serve God or serve the world.

Now we’d like to think that we don’t need to serve anyone, that we’re free, we can do what we want. The thing is, if we look at our lives and our existence honestly, we realize that can’t be the case. A human being cannot exist on his own. He is dependent on the outside world and the things and people in it.

For example, if you live in Rawlins and want to not freeze to death, you’ll need a house. Even if you can build it yourself, you’d need something to build it out of. And if you want to stay warm in your house, you’ll need something to burn, so you’re dependent on things like trees. And, it isn’t just your house that will need energy, you need it too – you need to eat. Humans aren’t plants that can just generate energy from sunlight.

No, God created us to eat, to be dependent on the world around us. Think about that. Even in the Garden of Eden, where man didn’t need a house or even clothing, he still needed to eat. It’s part of how God created mankind.

So when you look around, you realize you have needs. The question is, then, where will you satisfy those needs, so you don't need to worry? Will you look to the world, or to God?

So after Jesus lays out the reality that man is dependent on things outside himself and that he must serve someone or something in order to satisfy his needs, He directs us to look at several things and consider whom we should serve.

The first question He asks is this: "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Jesus here is asking if there is something greater, something more, to life than just the physical stuff in it.

If we look at this through the eyes of someone serving mammon, then the answer is "no." If you are serving mammon, if you are spending your life pursuing first and foremost the things of this world, then there isn't anything outside this world. The only things that matter are the material.

This is the viewpoint of modern scientism, or atheistic materialism. The universe is only matter and energy. People are simply complex biological machines. Your thoughts and consciousness are just an illusion, just a bunch of neurons firing inside your brain like a computer circuit. There is no higher purpose or meaning to anything, because purpose and meaning can only exist if there is someone higher who gives purpose.

Now as "logical" as this "scientific" worldview may sound, it does nothing to decrease anxiety in people. People are created to know that there is something more, that life is more than food and clothing, that there is purpose and meaning in the universe higher than physical or chemical processes, and so if you try to tell people (or convince yourself) that everything is ultimately meaningless, it creates conflict and dissonance in the mind. People know they have purpose, but they won't know where to look.

You can strive after mammon, getting more money and more stuff and more pleasure and whatever, but when you die it all goes away, and you go away, and just accumulating more junk and releasing as much dopamine in your brain as possible is a pretty terrible purpose for life. As this fails to grant fulfillment – and it will – you have more worry, not less, because you'll know you're missing... something.

So instead, consider the question from the viewpoint of a servant of God. "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Of course they are!

As a servant of God, I know that my life is a gift from God. He has given it to me, both this life and the life to come, purely out of His grace and mercy. He has also given it to me for a purpose. There is a reason I exist, and a reason why my life is what it is, and it's more than just food or acquiring stuff or climbing a corporate ladder or getting a million friends of Facebook or any other temporary, shallow thing.

You and I have been given life so that we may dwell with God, receiving His goodness and love, praising and worshiping His holy name, for eternity. And in this life, we have the purpose of sharing the love of God with others, being His hands and feet in works of mercy, His mouth to share the saving Gospel with others that they might understand that they have purpose and meaning and a God who loves them, too.

And, since my life is not actually my own, but God's, I know He will guard and keep it perfectly. I don't need to worry about what tomorrow will bring and will my life be sustained, or the lives of my family and friends, because God tells me in His Word that "my times are in [His] hand," and that He has established all the days of my life before it even began.

My body, like my life, is also a gift from God and in fact belongs to Him. In Baptism He made it a temple of the Holy Spirit – it's not just big carbon-based blob made by mutations and accidents. The Lord tells us that we are His creations, "fearfully and wonderfully made," as the Scriptures say. I don't need to worry, because as we confess in the Catechism, "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."

This care and provision are also seen in the next place our Lord directs us to look. "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them." We're directed to nature itself.

Through the eyes of someone serving mammon, worshiping the things of the world, nature is not a source of comfort, but worry and uncertainty. Just look at all the anxiety that surrounds the Climate Change movement in the world. People are legitimately terrified of what might happen if the sea levels rise, or the deserts expand, or the mass extinctions that will happen if the temperature rises a few degrees. If you don't do your part, so many people will die!

And even if you don't go to the levels of alarmism that some people in that movement would go to, nature still is unstable. Natural disasters, like we've seen in Hawaii and Libya and Morocco, unpredictably create harm and suffering for thousands and thousands of people. Even seemingly minor things, such as the cooler weather we've had and the fact that our garden hasn't grown much food for us this year, are a source of worry.

With no God governing it, nature seems to be an unfeeling lottery that might continue to sustain life, or we'll have droughts that will kill the crops and blizzards that wipe out our livestock and shut down the trucks for City Market and then the Yellowstone caldera will explode and kill off everything and everyone in North America. Who knows? Nature, by itself, is not comforting.

But as Christians, we look out and see a world governed by God, who continues to uphold and provide for it. Nature is filled with birds, creatures governed only by base instinct, who don't have weather forecasts or almanacs, who simply live day to day doing what God created them to do. They go out and look for some seeds, or gather some twigs for a nest, or just perch on a branch and sing the song the Lord has given to them. And despite this lack of planning or foresight or global awareness, the birds continue to exist and even thrive.

Or consider the other example the Lord gives from nature. "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." Grasses, and the wild plants of the fields, are some of the lowest things in nature. We don't really take notice of them at all, unless we're considering if we have to mow them again, or if there'll be enough for the cattle. They're about as common and basic as you can get.

And yet our Lord bestows great beauty upon them, designing and growing millions, maybe billions, of flowers throughout them. Even in places where no one will see the beauty, on isolated

meadows or up in the forests or on uninhabited islands, our Lord not only provides for His creation but bestows on it a small portion of His glory and splendor.

We can look at nature, not with fear and uncertainty, but as evidence that our God and Lord cares even for the smallest, most seemingly-inconsequential portions of creation, and so He will certainly care for and bless us.

This ties into the third place that our Lord would have us look, namely His love and care for us. The love and care of God really doesn't have a corresponding element if we try to consider it through the eyes of someone who serves mammon, because mammon has no love or care.

On the surface, it's just impersonal, nonliving stuff, and so it is not capable of consciously doing anything. When people serve mammon, though, Satan and his demons use it as an entryway to spread anxiety and other torments.

As Solomon is mentioned in our reading, think about his reign. Throughout the time he's king, Israel grows richer and richer, and Solomon's fame grows and grows. Yet at the same time, the kingdom and its king grow further and further from the Lord, trusting in wealth, military might, and marriage alliances with foreign powers instead. This leads, not to peace, but to more strife in the kingdom, to the point where by the time Solomon's son Rehoboam inherits the throne, the kingdom sits on the edge of civil war.

Or look at our own day. Jesus says to not worry about food or clothing. Today we have such a supply of food that, while there are people who go hungry in America, many, many more struggle with obesity from too much food. Or as the mission on the reservation is closing down, there are rooms and rooms full of clothing there, but we can't find anybody to take them because everywhere else is full of secondhand clothing.

Yet despite our abundance of food, clothing, and so many other material goods, our country is full of worry. The rates of antidepressant and anti-anxiety medication use, the sense of hopelessness and despair affecting younger and younger children in our schools, the rates of suicide and attempted suicide – it all points to the fact that our culture, our nation is enslaved to mammon, and that false god is pouring its poison into our souls.

But the true and only God, the God whom we serve as Christians, is not unfeeling, but a God who shows us love, even sacrificial love.

Part of what makes Christianity so literally unbelievable is that it speaks of a God who sacrifices of Himself for the sake of His creation. Other pagan religions and false gods demand sacrifice to get rewards. Just look at mammon. How many people sacrifice their peace, their families, their very lives chasing after wealth and prestige and possessions, and yet are never satisfied, but always wanting more?

But our God created us out of love, out of a desire to share His love with others. He placed us above the entire rest of creation, valuing us much more than the birds of the heavens or the flowers of the fields. And even when we rebel against Him and chase after false gods, He comes in love and mercy to bring us back to Him.

Nothing can offer more comfort and peace than the cross of Jesus, because there you can look and see the God who loves you and gave Himself up for you. And that is true for each and every one of you; no exceptions! St. Paul describes the cross of Christ as the perfect antidote to worry when he writes to the Romans and says, “He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?”

If you don’t have a crucifix in your home, I’d encourage you to get one, because when you are worried, or stressed, or fearful about what tomorrow will bring, you can look there and be reminded that God loves you so much He was willing to die for you on the cross, and if He’s willing to give you His very own life to secure the greatest good for you, what other good could He possibly hold back?

It’s in the context of this great love, shown in our existence, shown in nature, and shown in the love of God Himself, that our Lord directs us to seek first His Kingdom. He doesn’t give this command because He’s jealous or insecure, or a greedy tyrant. He tells us this because He knows what is best for us and desires to give it to us. He knows that if we chase after the worldly stuff that is mammon, we will drive ourselves away from true peace and security, and we’ll end up warped into hating our own Creator.

So instead, He calls on us to put the pursuits of heaven above anything worldly. The Almighty God is our loving Father, and He’ll make sure that we are given our daily bread as we go about the things of the Kingdom. When we look at things through the eyes of faith, we’ll have no worries, for we’ll know that our God is always caring for us.

In the name of Jesus, amen.