

Jesus' words in our Gospel text this morning are very straightforward, maddeningly so if you're trying to write a sermon on them. The main point is quite simply this: do not be anxious. Period. And as with all of Scripture, even a few words from the mouth of Jesus, such as "do not be anxious," are completely sure and certain.

However, Jesus doesn't just say, "Do not be anxious," and move on. No, in mercy, He gives us reasons why we as Christians need not be anxious. There's several here in this text alone, yet all tie into one main reason: God is who He says He is.

Anxiety comes in when we doubt that God is who He is, or when we look to the things of this world for security and peace. Yet if we believe, truly believe, that God is who we confess Him to be, that His words to us are sure and certain, they we have every assurance needed to "not be anxious." And we have this assurance, because our God is truth, and His word is truth.

One thing that this text makes clear about who God is is that God is the all-powerful Lord and Master of creation. And this is of course not unique to this text. The Bible starts off by telling us that God made the entire universe out of nothing, simply by speaking it into existence.

The Bible is also quite clear that God is all-powerful, in control of all things, with nothing limiting His might or escaping His will. Everything that exists does so because God desires it to exist.

This is the point Jesus then makes about the birds of the heavens. When you consider the birds of the air, they'll probably strike you as quite carefree. They fly from one branch to another, they sit and sing, they hunt for worms or seeds or bugs here and there.

The birds, and most creatures on earth, are only concerned with the day, the moment. Birds don't sow or reap or gather into barns. They aren't thinking about what they'll eat two months from now, or even tomorrow. They just operate on instinct, doing the basic things that God created them to do: eating when they're hungry, sleeping when they're tired, building a nest when they're ready to lay eggs.

And despite this lack of planning and foresight, the birds continue to live and thrive... because it is God Himself who is taking care of them. God created the birds, and God desires the birds to continue to fly through the heavens, so God continues to provide for them. It isn't random chance that they've made it this long in creation, or that evolution has guided their continued existence. God desires there to be birds, and so we have birds.

Likewise, you are here because God desires you to be here. The fact that your heart is still beating, your lungs are still breathing, your brain is still functioning is all because God wills it to be.

He does use a wide variety of means to bring this about, such as farmers who grow your food and gas field workers to provide heat for your house and doctors to tend to your medical needs, but God is still the one in control. And that means that even if those farmers have trouble getting their fertilizer and even if the gas industry is regulated out of existence and even if those doctors prescribe

treatments that aren't actually the best for you, nevertheless, if God desires to continue to stay fed and warm and well, then you will. Period.

It is your Heavenly Father who gives you daily bread, and nothing, nothing, can stop Him from doing that. So do not be anxious.

In addition to God's power, we see God's love, His concern for His creation. This is seen with the lilies. These are wildflowers which pop up seemingly at random in the field, and then die at random in the field. One individual flower would seem to us to have absolutely no worth or significance in a field full of flowers, on a planet with thousands, perhaps millions of different kinds of plants.

Who has concern for one little, insignificant flower? God does! In his desire to show forth beauty in His creation, God made it so that each little flower is an object of beauty, more glorious even than King Solomon in all his splendor, as Jesus says.

And so as Jesus says, "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 you of little faith?" Remember, unlike that lily, you were created in the image of God. You, and all humanity, are the pinnacle of God's creation. You are loved by God so much that He came and shed His blood for you.

When that lily dies, that's it. It's gone. But when you die, because of God's mercy shown to you in Christ, you will live. The Holy Spirit doesn't put saving faith into flowers or birds or any other other part of creation, but He does put it into your hearts through His Word and Sacraments, that you might live with Him forever.

If the Lord cares for flowers that no one will ever notice, then He most certainly cares for you. So do not be anxious.

In addition to God's power and God's love, Jesus here also talks about God's knowledge. "For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all."

God is fully aware of your needs – all of them, all the time. After all, He's the one who created you. He knows what you can and can't handle, because He is the one who gives you whatever strength and ability you have in the first place. He knows the situation you are in, from the most minute details to the big picture, even all of time and history.

And He knows what is best – truly best – for you. He knows, as our Father, that sometimes punishment and discipline are what is best for us, to get us to realize the sins we commit and bring us back to Him in repentance.

He knows that other times periods of challenge and trial are best for us, that we might learn to trust in Him more fully and have our faith be strengthened.

And He knows that other times we need rest and peace, and when those times come, He will most certainly grant us rest and peace. The point is, He knows. So do not be anxious.

God is powerful and in control. God is loving and caring. God knows. This is who God is, according to His revelation of Himself to us in His word.

And these aren't just empty words or illustrations, either. All of these attributes are clearly seen in God's actions, especially the cross.

No mere man has the power to take away the sins of another. No man can pay the price for even his own sins, much less those of the whole world. But Jesus, God and man, did exactly that. He crushed the head of that serpent we couldn't touch, ripped the veil between heaven and earth that we couldn't grasp, smashed down the gates of hell which would otherwise keep us locked away forever.

And when He had done all this, He rose again, coming up from the grave because even death has to give way to His Almighty power.

He did this, not out of pride or arrogance, but out of love and care for His people. It was God's love that caused Him to send His Son to the cross. It was God's love that caused Him to hang there and be insulted and suffer. It is God's love that causes Him to share that forgiveness of sins with unworthy sinners like you or me.

It ought to be you and I hanging there. But God loves you too much to allow that. And as St. Paul was inspired to write, "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?" The cross is God's love for you.

The Son of God used that power, in love, knowing full well what it would entail.

He knew that He would suffer the wrath and agony not just of the body but of hell's torments upon the soul.

He knew that many would reject His gracious gift and choose to serve false gods like wealth rather than rejoice in His mercy.

He knew that even His people, you and I, would continue to sin against Him, even after having been brought to faith and made His brothers and sisters. He knows the extent of your sin, your failures, your lack of trust in Him as you try to add hours to your life through worrying.

He knows, and He still died for you.

God's mighty power and loving care and total knowledge are there for you on the cross. The Lord who provides for the birds and cares for the lilies and knows what the Gentiles and all people need gave Himself there for you. You can look at that and know precisely why you need not be anxious. God has given you the greatest gift imaginable: His own Son.

Having received that gift, and thereby being freed from anxiety, you are free to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. You are free to live as God's servants, not having to worry about tomorrow, or even today, because the Lord of All is watching over you.

As Christ here commands, seek to live first and foremost as His chosen people. Shine His light and truth into a world enveloped in darkness and lies. Pursue the eternal things of God over the temporary things of man. Will the world – the Gentiles – think you're stupid and backwards and bigoted for doing so? Of course they will! Yet the things they strive after continually, your God has promised to add them all unto you.

You have one master, one Lord, one Father: the powerful, loving, knowing God. So do not be anxious.

In Jesus' name, amen.