17 Homily for the Eighth Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

26 February 2017

Is 49:14-15; 1 Cor 4:1-5; Mt 6:24-34

'Mother Teresa – An Authorized Biography' by Kathryn Spink records one instance of her trust in the divine providence as follows: There was the time in Calcutta when Mother ran out of food and the next food supply was two days away. She had about seven thousand people expecting to be fed for those two days. For some unanticipated reason the government closed down schools for two days, and all the bread that would have been provided for the schoolchildren was sent to the Missionaries of Charity. She received just enough bread to serve everybody for two days. This is one among her many amazing stories of providence.

Today in the Gospel Jesus preaches a radical message of blind submission of one’s trust into God’s hand. But let us ask the question “To whom did Jesus preach and teach this message?” The audience of Jesus is a bunch of peasants who try to live hand to mouth all the time; peasants could not afford the luxury of thinking ahead. So is he insensitive to the difficulties of those poor peasants? Certainly not! Like all human beings, they were anxious about the basics of life: food, drink, and clothes. Given the subsistence economy in which they lived and the unpredictable events in nature like droughts and famine, and the voracious taxes they were forced to pay, how could they think of anything but survival?

Jesus’ advice is simple yet cleverly delivered. Without pointing his finger or naming names, he selects a masculine Aramaic noun (birds) and a feminine Aramaic noun (anemones, or lilies of the field) and urges men and women not to worry. With the birds, Jesus associates men’s work (sowing, reaping, harvesting); with the lilies of the field, women’s work (spinning yarn, making clothes). Hence, one must trust in God, the heavenly patron, who knows the clients’ basic needs and who will meet them in his time.

Dear Friends, why do we worry all the time? Because we are afraid of emptiness, void and a certain vacancy within us. A Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza called this “horror vacui,” our horrendous fear of vacancy; our fear of void and emptiness. We like to occupy – fill up – every empty time and space. We want to be occupied and preoccupied with our empty time and space; that is, we fill the empty spaces before we have even reached them. We fill them with our worries and anxieties, saying, “But what if ...”. God wants to dwell in our emptiness. But as long as we are afraid of God and God’s actions in our lives, it is unlikely that we will offer our emptiness to God. Let us surrender our plans, worries and anxieties to Christ, trusting in Him above all things. Let me wind up this reflection with a poem by J.Janda:

You are so afraid so worried

I know you are good in your heart

I know you want to do what is right

I know all about you

I watched you grow in your mother’s womb—

before you were born I spoke your name

I know when you stand up—when you sit down

nothing is hidden from me

come, waste some time with me