

Almighty God, You know our necessities before we ask, and even our ignorance in asking: Set free Your servants from all anxious thoughts for the morrow; give us contentment with Your good gifts; and confirm our faith that according as we seek Your kingdom, You will not let us lack any good thing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 121)

Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

In Christ Jesus, our righteousness, which allows us to be full-fledged citizens of His eternal Kingdom, dear fellow redeemed:

You have witnessed it, if not experienced it personally, when guests are soon to arrive and those responsible for cleaning the house and preparing the meal are all in a tizzy. So much so, that even during the entire visit the worries and mundane attentions prevent them from enjoying the visit and are thoroughly exhausted when the guests finally leave. The whole purpose of the cleaning and food preparation was overwhelmed and the guests may even look at each other afterwards shrugging their shoulders wondering why they even came in the first place. If you have ever been intimately involved in planning a wedding celebration, you can certainly identify with this.

So it is with the cares of this life, we can worry and fret about them so much so that we lose sight of the most important reason for our existence in the first place. God intends the entire human race will spend eternity with Him in the peace and safety of His heavenly home, but our temporary homes and lives can consume us so that this divine purpose is lost to us. This can even happen to us as Christians, so take to heart the lesson from our text: **Beware, Ordinary Anxieties Upset Spiritual Priorities.**

I

In His Sermon on the Mount our Lord Jesus says to us: "do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Then Jesus gives us the

reason for letting all such anxieties fade away, He says: “For the Gentiles seek after all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.”

But the gracious providence of our heavenly Father can easily be forgotten with the pressing needs begging for our attention in this life. So our Lord gives us some very practical direction by saying: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” This lost priority was afflicting Martha in our text as she sought Jesus to join her in her rebuke of Mary who was not helping in the preparations for their honorable guest. While Martha was hustling and bustling about, Mary just sat there. Martha needed her sister’s help right there and then!

In our Catechism under the Third Commandment we consider this question: *“How do we despise God’s Word and preaching?”* In part we have this for the answer: *“We despise God’s Word and preaching ... by neglecting divine worship for such reasons as ... unnecessary work.”* Now a case could be made that Martha was not despising God’s Word and preaching and her work as a hostess was necessary work for such a special guest as Jesus. But it was her despising of Mary’s choice to hear the Word of her Lord that Jesus corrected.

Mary was not guilty of any sin in this regard. In truth, she was doing a fine work of sitting at her Lord’s feet listening to His teaching. But Martha, with her false accusation against her sister put her in jeopardy of losing that good portion for herself by not recognizing the priority of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Again, Martha was not sinning by tending to the physical needs of her guest. But the anxieties, which filled her heart made her into an unjust judge over her sister and frankly even Jesus.

II

How are you doing with the ordinary anxieties of your life my fellow redeemed? They naturally come to us in this life as sinners to be sure, but are they overwhelming you these days so that your spiritual priorities are being upset like was happening to Martha?

Financial concerns are usually a biggie with us. Jesus pointed this out at the beginning of our Gospel lesson: “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 money.” Most of us are so blessed in this life that we do not even ask what we will eat or drink or what we will wear in our ordinary life. But we can become stressed out over our entertainment budgets, our vacation plans, providing college education for our children, our impending retirements, our ability to leave an inheritance, etc. So

while these things are not the necessities of life, we can easily substitute them in our worrying and fretting since our daily bread seems so secure that we in our Costco age get to think in terms of monthly bread and beyond. What worries keeps you up at night?

What about health care issues – its costs, its diagnoses, its impact on our loved ones, etc.? Is our heavenly Father aware of these things and will He provide all that we need? Seeking first His Kingdom and His righteousness you have the answer. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus answers with a resounding “Yes”. Yes your Father in heaven cares for you with a love reaching back into eternity and extending forward into eternity as well. Consider the outstretched arms of our Lord Jesus on the cross beam of that cross. So broad is His love for you that your common ordinary everyday needs do not escape His awareness and loving care.

What if Mary was the one that spoke up and said to Jesus: *“Lord do you not care that my sister does not sit at Your feet like I am? Tell her to stop being so busy with her silly preparations and sit along with me, so we can give our undivided attention to Your every Word.”* Do you think Jesus would have said: *“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things.”*? No, very likely He would have said: *“Mary, Mary you are listening without hearing. Martha has chosen to serve us with her loving acts of kindness. Leave her alone. What she is doing is a fine service in My kingdom.”*

Yes there are spiritual priorities and we in our Christian freedom are called upon to order them in such a way that gives God all the glory and serves our neighbor. As you seek first the Gospel of forgiveness as the power of God in your life, you are able to give attention to all your responsibilities without the anxieties of this life overwhelming you. This is now how you have been set free: your sins of worrying and fretting have all been forgiven through the shed blood of your Savior. Never did Jesus worry nor question the gracious providence of His Father. His holy life of perfect spiritual prioritization is now yours through faith. Living at peace with God in His kingdom even now as you labor in the kingdom of the world is truly liberating.

What is distracting you with worries these days? Politics is a big one right now. How much out of your hands is this area of life? Is Jesus, the Lord of the Church, still in control? Of course He is and all things, absolutely all things in human history have been and will be directed by Him to benefit His Church. Give Revelation a quick read and see.

Humble yourselves under the powerful working of the Spirit in

your life through Word and Sacrament and the naturally sinful desire to fill your life with the anxious thoughts and works of self-righteousness will dissolve. Your faith in the God who has done all things well for you for all eternity will most surely do all things well for you tomorrow as well. God's grace for you in His Son is the one thing that is necessary and all other blessings flow to you on account of it. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, and your spiritual priorities will be set in order, so that all you do will redound to His everlasting glory and help your neighbors today and tomorrow in all their needs. Amen.