

## Trinity 15

I take as my text today from the Gospel of St. Matthew:

*Therefore I say unto you, Be not anxious for your life....*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.*

In the revealing of God to man through **Holy Scripture**, one of the greatest revelations, most especially in the **New Testament**, is the absoluteness of God's love for us and his desire that we love him.

While there is certainly evidence in the **Old Testament** of God's love for mankind, as we mentioned last week, it is in the **New Covenant** that we see it most obviously revealed and fulfilled in the **Incarnation**, and through the offering up of Jesus Christ on the **Cross** for the Redemption of all Creation.

It is so beautifully expressed by our Lord in these words found in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. John's Gospel:

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

In this context we can begin to explore the implication of our Lord's words recorded in the Gospel passage from St. Matthew, seemingly two separate thoughts that center around our relationship to God and our relationship to our fellow human beings.

So, what is our relationship to God? What is our relationship to our fellow human beings? Indeed, what rights and responsibilities do we have as creatures of God?

The answers to these questions mirror what is both a simple, yet complex relationship of God to man, man to God, and man to the material world.

The basis of this relationship can be simply stated:

1. God is the undisputed Master.
2. We have no rights of our own.
3. All things belong to God.

That may be a rather blunt way of putting it; however, that is the way it is, whether we accept or reject God; whether we even acknowledge that there is God.

From this bluntness, we can begin to see a reasonable and wonderful truth: God is in control; yet, when we explore Holy Scripture, we find that the basis of his relationship with us is love, purely and simply.

Of course, we put obstacles in the way of that relationship when we fail to trust him, and instead put our trust in the material world; when we fail to return that love.

Jesus said: *You cannot serve God and mammon*, meaning you cannot serve two masters. The assumption is, is that you will love one and hate the other. Either God is the master, or *mammon* is the master.

But what is *mammon*?

*Mammon* was a Hebrew word for *material possessions*. Its root comes from *to entrust* and in its historical meaning, *mammon* was wealth that was entrusted to another person for safekeeping.

Over time the meaning of *mammon* evolved from *that which is entrusted*, to mean *that in which people put their trust*.

Thus, *mammon* came to be material possessions, wealth and all the trappings, that usurped God's place and became objects of worship.

Perhaps, even more clearly today, we can see that evolution of *mammon* as it came to mean *that in which people put their trust* and supplanting God's place in our lives.

However, if we recall the blunt truth as we have stated, this relationship we have with God becomes clearer when we consider the terms *master* and *serve* as Jesus uses them — *master* denoting absolute ownership and *serve* meaning *to be a slave to*.

In essence, we see God as owning us absolutely, and we owe all that we are and have to him. Or we see the material world as our master, to which we have given over ourselves lock, stock, and barrel.

As always, we have a choice: **God** or *mammon*.

Jesus is telling us that our choice should be God and, if we listen to the words of Jesus and take them into our hearts, we can see clearly that it is God to whom we, as Christians, are enslaved, and it is in him alone that we must put our trust.

Are wealth or material possessions evil?

Of course not. Wealth and material possessions in and of themselves are not evil. We find in the 1<sup>st</sup> Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy, in chapter 6, verse 10, that it is *the love of money* that is the root of evil. The evil is in the role it plays in our lives.

As God is the sole creator of everything; that there is nothing created that was not created by him; it follows, then, that all we possess is God's for our use, and we should always take care to use whatever he has given us, or allowed us to possess, in a manner that is pleasing to him. All things belong to God, we included.

It is our responsibility to use whatever wealth or possessions, or gifts God has bestowed upon us as good stewards of his Grace.

If we, as Christians, can understand our relationship with God; that he is in control; he is **Master**; that he indeed owns us;

If we can understand that he has created all, everything, and has entrusted these things to us to use in his service;

If we can understand that God is indeed love;

Then, we can approach an aspect of our relationship with God that is often underplayed and falls under the term: worry.

It is illustrated in that beautiful passage about the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, bringing home the whole concept of God as **Lord** and **Master**, God as the **Creator**, and God as **Love**:

**Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.**

Jesus is not encouraging a lackadaisical approach to life; rather, he is comforting us by telling us to put aside *worrisome fear*, the fear that takes away from all the joys of life; the worry that is characteristically a distrust of God.

So, now, for all the difficulty of what Jesus is telling us, it is beautifully and simply illustrated when he describes the beauty of his creation and his provision for it.

*Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not ye of much more value than they?*

And....

*Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?*

As the birds of the air and the lilies of the field want not, we need not want for anything, if we put aside needless worry, and trust in him.

Remember, now, that what Jesus is telling us in this passage is not to be taken literally.

What we are being told relates to that simple but complex relationship we have to God and he to us and to all his creation, and our relationship to the world in which we live.

How simple the complex becomes when we consider the great love he has for us as his **Creation**. How great the possibilities when we accept his love for us, love him in return, and share that love with those around us.

God created the world to be good. His **Creation** is a product of his love.

We, of all his creatures, are the only ones capable of rejecting him, of rejecting his love. We have the choice — **God** or *mammon*.

However we chose, God is in control.