

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.*

Perhaps the one thing that I have emphasized the most is that God is **Love**. That is how he has been revealed to us in **Holy Scripture** — the revelation of God to man through **Holy Scripture**, most especially in the **New Testament**, of the absoluteness of God's **Love** for us and his desire that we love him.

While seemingly contrary in the **Old Testament** where God is often depicted as a *God of Wrath*, there is also much evidence in the **Old Testament** of God's **Love** for mankind, as we mentioned last week in the text from Micah.

But it is in the **New Covenant** that we see it most obviously, explicitly revealed and fulfilled in the **Incarnation**, and in the **Crucifixion** with the offering up of Jesus Christ on the **Cross** for the *Redemption of mankind and of all Creation*.

It is so beautifully expressed by our Lord in these words found in the 15th chapter of St. John's Gospel, foretelling that *Sacrifice on the Cross*:

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

Furthermore, we can witness the *Love of God* in the world around us, especially if we just take time to look at the wonders of nature, from the clouds above to the creatures that inhabit the planet, even the insects that crawl upon the ground or swirl around us.

When we take into consideration the beauty of all of God's **Creation** and his love for all that he has created, including us, we can begin to explore the implication of 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? Moreover, what rights and responsibilities do we have as *Creatures* of God?

The answers to these questions reflect what is both a simple, yet a 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. Yes, God is in control; however, in **Holy Scripture**, we find that the basis of his relationship with us is **Love**, purely and simply. We also discover that he gives us choice in our relationship with him.

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. Simply, 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.

Clearly today, we can see the evolution of *mammon* from *that which is entrusted* as it came to mean *that in which people put their trust*, indeed, supplanting God's place in our lives.

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

In this context, we see God as owning us absolutely, and we owe all that we are and have to him. Or, on the other hand, we see the material world as our master, to which we give over ourselves lock, stock, and barrel.

As always, we have a choice: **God** or *mammon*, our **Creator**, or the *world*.

Jesus is telling us that our choice should be God, and, if we listen to the words of our Lord 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.

But, what about wealth or material possessions — are they evil?

Of course not. Wealth and material possessions, in and of themselves, are not evil. Then, if not, what is the evil?

We find in the 1st Epistle of St. Paul to Timothy 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, and that includes us.

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; that 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.

Not that we just do nothing, expecting God to do everything for us. The passage is not to be taken literally.

It all 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**.

He demonstrated his great **Love** for us in the **Sacrifice on the Cross** of his Only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ — an offering of love beyond our human comprehension.

God always wants what is best for us. But in the end, we, of all his **Creatures**, are the only ones capable of rejecting him, of rejecting or accepting his infinite **Love**. We have the choice — **God** or *mammon*.