

## “Shoot me! Or not?” Matthew 6:25-33

“Therefore, I tell you, 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?

Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But 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?

Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

If I beat up some of our church council members, or if I committed adultery, or if I stole all the offerings, it would be quite clear that, yes, our pastor has sinned. There would be no doubt about that. But... it is very different if in my heart I fear, love and trust something else, and not the Triune God. That's true for all of us.

I guess, no one would see it, most likely I wouldn't know about it either, but in fact that would be much more serious spiritual danger than those open sins, which are easy to see, easy to identify, and we could say, relatively easy to repent from.

Today, as we celebrate the Harvest Festival, let's reflect on something that may be hiding from us, and that may be much more serious an issue, much more serious a condition of our hearts than we usually think of it. Something that robs us of our peace and joy and makes us anxious and foolish. This is what we will do.

We will try to answer these three questions. **Why are we anxious? Why not be anxious? What to do instead of being anxious?** Why are we anxious, why not to be anxious and what to do instead?

**Why are we anxious?** First, we need to clarify what Jesus means when He says “don't be anxious about what to eat or what to put on”. He isn't encouraging us to be careless and not worrying about anything. No! That's not good.

He also is not saying that we should not be concerned about many things comprising our daily bread. We certainly should, it is our responsibility to be concerned about the wellbeing of all the people in our lives. No doubt about that.

What Jesus is saying with “don’t be anxious” is that we should not assign inadequate significance to those matters of “food and cloth”, that they should not be at the centre of our attention, that our lives should not revolve around them.

That being said, now we need to read one more verse, which comes right before today’s reading: **“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.”** (Mat 6:24)

Why are we anxious? This has to do with which god we really worship. Which master we really trust and rely upon, and fear to lose. Sure, as we are all here, it would seem that Jesus Christ is our Lord. Sure. But let us dig a bit deeper.

Often it is thought that those are the rich people who serve money. They are those who are enslaved by Mammon. Because they have so much stuff. But that is not correct. Jesus is not talking about the size of our possessions. He is talking about the condition of our hearts – what we trust in to give us a good life.

We may have nothing, but if in our hearts we believe that if only we had more money, everything would be fine, then, in fact, we are enslaved to Mammon. We may feel safe and in control if we have, or desperate and lost if we don’t have, but both reveal the same attachment of our hearts, we trust in Mammon.

So, what do we fear to lose the most? Let’s examine ourselves. What would make you more anxious? Scenario # 1. You wake up tomorrow and all your possessions are gone. All of them. Or, scenario # 2. You wake up and there are no more congregations where you can hear the Gospel and receive the Holy Sacrament?

Which of these makes our hearts sink deeper? Which one would make you desperate? And the truth is, that we all could probably lose most of what we have, and we could still thank our God for blessing us so richly with our daily bread, for the Lord has granted us so much harvest, we have so much, so much... Yes, we do!

It is estimated that the average Australian household would spend around 500\$ per week for recreation, drinks, tobacco, and entertainment. Not to mention luxury purchases, eating out, and so on. 25K per year! One average household!

Just imagine, if we had 10 such households in our congregation, and the Spirit would lead them to give half [!] of their entertainment money to the Gospel, that’s our yearly budget. That’s it. We would be so well off...

And how do we think about our possessions? Which one of the following describes better what we believe in our hearts? First, “Whatever I have, my talents and my possessions, it all belongs to the Lord, and He has entrusted them to me to bless me and so that they may be used to bless as many others as possible.”

Or, second, “whatever I have, it all belongs to me. Sure, I do share some of that with my congregation and other causes... as much as it doesn’t cause me any inconvenience... as much as it doesn’t require me to give up anything I like.”

We need to reflect on these questions, both as individual Christians and also as congregations. Which one is us? I don't know about you, examine yourselves; I sort of believe the first one, but in practice... it is so much closer to the second.

What does it tell, which god do we really fear, love and trust? Who is functionally our god? Remember how Jesus calls those people who are anxious about what they will eat and what they will put on? Gentiles. Unbelievers.

Those who pray: "I thank you, my dear earthly possessions, that you have graciously kept me this day, I pray, keep me this night also. For into your hands, I commend myself, my body and soul!" Sounds embarrassing and foolish, I know, but how different really are the attitudes of our hearts?

This is a serious matter, and, perhaps, we reflect on it too little. It just doesn't feel comfortable to talk about these matters. Let's not touch our sacred wallets! But, perhaps, we should reflect on them much more.

What was our second question? **Why not be anxious?** Jesus makes a really good argument. It is called from the larger to smaller. **"Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"** The answer is obvious. Of course, they are.

Our life, our body, sure they are more important than food that we eat and clothes that we put on. Just imagine that you are being robbed: "Give us your clothes, or we will beat you up!" What would you do? "Go ahead, beat me up!" Of course, not!

Or: "Give us all your lunch money, or we will shoot you!" What would you do? "Yes, shoot me, I don't care!" Of course, not! Our life and our bodies are so much more important... They are us. And, this is the point that Jesus makes.

Your Father who is in heaven "He has given you your body and soul, eyes, ears, and all your members, your reason and all your senses, and still takes care of them." He has given to you what is truly precious, your body and your life, and He keeps giving them to you day after day, year after year. He never fails you.

Why would we worry about less significant gifts, like food and cloth? Look at God's creation! **"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them..."**

**Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these... Are you not of more value than them?"** Of course, you are of so much more value!

But... we also know that sometimes birds freeze in the cold, and starve, we know that flowers are cut down and wither. Life is harsh. The same is true for us, Christians, especially for those who are sent to deliver His Good News.

As Jesus foretold, we are to expect all kinds of difficulties, sometimes it may be a shortage of our daily bread, living day by day from hand to mouth, but that is not the worst that could happen. And even if it does happen, for God's children that is not a reason to be anxious, for we know that our Father knows what we need.

He knows what you need. Every day... Remember, in the Bible “to know” means deep, personal, intimate knowledge. He knows you, He cares for you, He hasn’t forgotten about you, and He never will.

**Finally, what to do instead of being anxious?** This is a very practical question. For as we know negative commands don’t work too well. Don’t crave, don’t lust, don’t be anxious! Somehow, we only hear... crave, lust, be anxious!

Thus, we need a positive command. Here it is: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** What does this mean, and how will this help us not to be anxious?

God’s kingdom has come to us in Jesus. It means, seek Jesus’ presence, seek to listen to Him, to be blessed by Him, so that He restores you to be who you are created to be, living in loving relationships with our God and with one another.

And being in His presence **“cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.”** (1 Pet 5:9) He cares for you so much that **“though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”** (2 Cor 8:9)

What does that mean? Jesus Christ left His heavenly glory, the place of life and love and light and joy and blessedness and beauty and holiness, all the best He had. He left all of that. Why? So that one day He could give it all to you.

He not only cares for your life and body; He wants to give you so much more. New life, true and everlasting life, and also new body, resurrected body, perfect, beautiful, enjoyable, He wants you in His presence in New Creation forever.

He wants you to seek what He has prepared for you. To rejoice in it. And to assure you that all this is coming, Jesus has given you His Spirit, **“who is the [God’s] guarantee of your inheritance until you acquire possession of it.”** (Eph 1:14)

What shall we do not to be anxious? Let’s embrace all the opportunities to be with Jesus. Let’s seek Him in the body of Christ and in our mutual care and prayers, let’s seek Him in the midst of congregation, as we feast together in His presence.

Let’s seek Him as He speaks to us, when we study His Word, on our own, and together with brothers and sisters. Let’s seek Him in Christian fellowship, where we are called to be little Christs to one another.

Let’s do this, so that you are daily assured by your Father Himself, that He knows you and your needs and that He genuinely cares for you. May Jesus be the centre of your lives, and may everything revolve around Him, for He does provide for you.

And then we are at peace regardless of how much or how little we may have. Then we are free to enjoy all our talents and possessions for what they are, not our masters, not the source of our life and security, but God’s gifts and blessings, entrusted to us so that we could bless others.

How joyful and satisfying such life is! That is most certainly true. Amen!