

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – February 26, 2017 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 49:14-15

Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me;
my LORD has forgotten me.”
Can a mother forget her infant,
be without tenderness for the child of her womb?
Even should she forget,
I will never forget you.

Psalm: Ps 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9

R. (6a) **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

Only in God is my soul at rest;
from him comes my salvation.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all.

R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

Only in God be at rest, my soul,
for from him comes my hope.
He only is my rock and my salvation,
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed.

R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

With God is my safety and my glory,
he is the rock of my strength; my refuge is in God.
Trust in him at all times, O my people!

Pour out your hearts before him.

R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Brothers and sisters: Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. It does not concern me in the least that I be judged by you or any human tribunal; I do not even pass judgment on myself; I am not conscious of anything against me, but I do not thereby stand acquitted; the one who judges me is the Lord. Therefore do not make any judgment before the appointed time, until the Lord comes, for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will manifest the motives of our hearts, and then everyone will receive praise from God.

Gospel: Matthew 6:24-34

Jesus said to his disciples: “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek.

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 given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil.”

Prayer for a New Bishop

Heavenly Father,

You have blessed our diocese time and again with good and holy bishops who have led us ever closer to you. Aware of your profound love for us, we ask you to bless us once again. Send us a good and holy man to become our next bishop. Inspire us, the clergy, religious and the laity of the diocese to work generously with him so that we might grow together in your love and continue the good work you have begun in us for the sake of all. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Value most what is most valuable and you will find peace. The readings from this Sunday make that very point. They are cool and quietening, refreshing in times such as the present ones. Keep yourself calm every day, they say. But how can they offer calm to us when so many things are wrong? Jesus' Gospel words about peace need some explaining. First, he says, don't get all upset about what you will eat or drink. Look at the birds of the air. They go where there is food and the Lord provides the kind they need. Jesus' point: the heavenly Father feeds you too, since you are more important than birds are. Get your values straight. Then, as to the clothes you put on, you are worth more than what you wear. Have you thought about this? Sometimes we get quite attached to how we are going to look to others. Or does shame enter in? I told a story several weeks ago about a wise man spooning food down his coat sleeve at a party. The host had demanded that the man put on good clothes, so it must have been the clothes that were invited to the party, not the guest! As we grow older, of course, our bodies need the help of garments!—but that is not the point. Jesus is looking to something much deeper, and the theme is, value what is most valuable. You are more than how you look. God is more valuable than you. Therefore, love each in proportion to each other.

Set your values on what is most valuable and you will find peace.

And look at the flowers of the field, he says of their beauty. They do not work or spin, but they are more impressive than even King Solomon in all his glory. Go outside, observe the natural beauty you had forgotten all about. Here is what the poet says about an ivy field: "There she basks, Purple eyes and seas of liquid leaves all day."* Seas of liquid leaves! Can we let ourselves catch this sight, observe the delicious kindness that God shows toward growing things? If we can, we will see Jesus' point. God finds each of us more beautiful than even the life bursting forth outdoors. Won't God provide for us at least as much as for these transitory delicacies? Maybe you are spending your life on what is of small value: what you will eat, what you will wear, how long you will live. These things do not last. They are too far down the scale of values. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself. Sufficient for a day is its own evil (Gospel). Set your values on what is most valuable and you will find peace. If you and I are at all alike, you too have an uninvited voice inside you that says, "Oh yeah? Well prove it. Prove that God is worth more than the treasures around me." Ok, here is the proof, in God's own words to each of us, from the First Reading: Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you. God will never forget you. Can you let this love be the number one value in your life?

* Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Patience, Hard Thing*

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. "The Lord has forsaken me." Did Jesus say this? Did he endure it? Who can relate to such misery today? How do you think God comforts people in 2017?
2. Do the motives of our hearts relate to being good stewards of the gospel? What motivates your heart?
3. John Shea, STD, suggests that the Gospel offers two scenarios: "(1) understand and inhabit your life as an anxious project for future physical survival or (2) understand and inhabit your life as a present gift sustained by God prior to any human activity to secure it." What happens to the concerns of (1) if you choose (2)?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Grant us, O Lord, we pray, that the course of our world may be directed by your peaceful rule and that your Church may rejoice, untroubled in her devotion. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen