

Epiphany 8A (2/27/11 – *You’re in God’s Hands ... Literally*)

In the Name of JESUS. [Amen]

Anxiety. You know about it – all too well, perhaps. When you were younger, you were anxious about an exam in your most difficult subject ... or that big school project. When you were a little older, your anxiety had to do with fitting in with the group considered “in.” You may have become anxious about money, too – for a new piece of technology ... a car ... or the latest fashions. Those who thought that far ahead were anxious about college – a major ... finances to get through it ... a career afterward.

Adults often have lots of anxiety. We look at the world around us – and (especially as Christians) we may think things are falling apart morally. We look at the economy around us and we may think that the future looks shaky at best – maybe even quite bleak ... depending on one’s retirement and savings and job prospects. And it worries us. You might even say we are afraid – afraid of being unable to make ends meet ... afraid of being unable to put food on the table and clothes on our backs ... afraid of what the future will bring (or not bring).

But what does our Savior say? *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. ... 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.* [MT 6.25, 31-32] And the bottom line is, when we are anxious and worried and fearful about such things – we are failing to trust God. Our *INTROIT* puts it this way: *Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us.* [PSA 62.8] Yes, that’s the rub. Our anxiety is a manifestation of our lack of trust in the Lord. We do not *fear, love, and trust in God above all things*. We do not *trust in Him at all times*. We do not always pour out our hearts before Him in prayer, believing that He truly hears us and provides us with all that we need

in the body and life. We do not take refuge in Him as we ought.

And even when things are better, we are still anxious and worried. Our wants have become to us like needs. *I have to have that... I need it*, we say of this or that item – a new car, a new iPhone, a new computer, new fashionable clothing or jewelry ... you name it. No, you don't, actually! You don't **need** it. You just **want** it – want it so badly that it is all you can think about ... all you strive for ... work for ... eat, sleep, and breathe for.

If we bother to ask God for it – for what amounts to a luxury item ... unnecessary for our survival and well-being – we don't really like it when the answer is, *No, you don't need that*. And so we take things into our own hands. *I will have it*, we say to ourselves – *even if I don't need it*. Again, it takes up a big chunk of our resources – our time and talents and treasures. We spend so much of what God has given us in getting something novel. We waste so very much of our God-given resources for fleeting, moth-eaten, rust-destroying stuff – refuse, really.

Now the thing you sought to be your servant – to make your life easier – has become your master. And again we hear our Savior's voice: ***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. You cannot serve God and earthly things. You cannot serve God and Mammon.*** [MT 6.24] We have broken the First Commandment. We have sinned against God.

Anxiety over the things we need is a lack of trust in the God Who breathes life into us. And even if we are not exactly anxious, making the fulfilling of even the basic needs of life our number one priority – ahead of God – is making it our master. We are guilty of idolatry.

What is the solution? What is His antidote for our anxiety? Jesus sets before us several arguments, so that our weak, anxious hearts may be put at ease ... and may know His peace. The first is an argument from the greater to the lesser. We do not concern ourselves – generally, at least – with how

God gives us life ... and how He forms our body. We do not trouble ourselves, particularly, with the details of how God breathes into us His breath of life, nor how He has determined the many different types of cells in our bodies and linked them together to in such a magnificent manner to enable us the power of walking, grasping, carrying, building, etc. These are the “biggies” – **that** we are alive ... **that** we have such a body equipped to do so very many wonderful tasks.

If God has taken care of such great matters – formed our bodies in the womb and given us life ... not to mention creating and sustaining the entire universe and all that is in it, will He not take care of the lesser, much easier matters – providing food to sustain the lives and clothing to protect and keep our bodies warm? Of course He will! That is what our Savior is getting at when He says: *Is no life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* [6.25b] God will most certainly provide for us. Therefore, we can be confident and *Trust in Him at all times* [PSA 62.8].

The next argument – or proof – our Lord preaches to us is one from the lesser to the greater. Think about the birds, which are so much smaller than we are ... unable to think much at all – and the flowers that cannot think or even move from one place to another. The birds receive food sufficient to sustain their lives. They do not have to prepare the field and plant. They do not have to harvest and store. *Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?* [MT 6.26b] Of course you are! That is the point Jesus is making. You are more important to God than the birds. If He feeds them, He will certainly feed you! Therefore, you may *Trust in Him at all times*. {Incidentally, here our Lord overthrows the position of radical animal rights activists who place animal life on a plane equal to – and sometimes great than – human life. God’s Word is clear: human life is more important. After all, God made mankind as the pinnacle of His creation – indeed, made everything else to give to us as a gift.}

Likewise, you need not be concerned with what you will wear. God

clothes the lilies of the field in great splendor. Even wise and wealthy Solomon was not clothed in such glory, Jesus tells you [MT 6.29]. If God makes sure that the flowers and the grass are arrayed in beauty, He will certainly take care of clothing the wonderful body He made for you!

Greater still is your need to have your soul fed so that it may flourish – and your flesh clothed that it may be arrayed in righteousness before God. Your heavenly Father has taken care of these greater needs also in Christ your Savior; and delivers it all to you by means of His Holy Word and Sacraments. ***Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*** [6.25b] Actually, that could be translated: ***Is not the soul more than food.*** Even as the heavenly Father provides food for plants and animals and people alike – out of His divine mercy and fatherly love – so also He gives you food for your soul ... especially in this place.

Here especially God nourishes you with His Holy Gospel. The sins of anxiety and placing worldly matters before God all are forgiven for the sake of Christ. From the Altar you are fed with the holy Body and Blood of your Savior – and thus you are assured of your place in His kingdom. In Holy Baptism you were clothed in the most glorious robe of Christ's righteousness. And from the Cross – where your Lord Jesus ***engraved you on the palms of His hands*** [ISA 49.16a] – the heavenly Father's provision for your soul shines forth to ever cleanse you from every spot and stain of sin so that you are renewed in the splendorous beauty of holiness before Him

The longstanding marketing slogan for one insurance company has been: *You're in good hands*. The epiphany from your Lord today is this: ***You're in God's Hands ... Literally*** – engraved on His palms. You have nothing to fear ... nothing about which to be anxious. You are found in the Kingdom of God and in the righteousness of Christ... and all things shall be added unto you – in this life already now (despite whatever temporary struggles you may have) ... and especially in the next ... for life everlasting.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]