

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA  
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

“We didn’t have to worry about a thing.”

The couple kept repeating that line: “we didn’t have to worry about a thing.”

They were telling me the story about their experience decades ago. One of their children, an active little boy, was stricken with a brain tumor. He was dying.

The couple made the decision that they would care for their son at home. They knew they would have their hands full. They had four other young children. And their boy with the tumor was showing behavioral changes because of the disease. This was going to be hard.

And then... and then their priest visited one day and said, “What do you need?”

From their hearts, they articulated their stress and fears: “who is going to drive our other children to ballet and baseball? How will we cook dinner each night? Who will sit with our sick child when he needs round the clock care?”

And the pastor said to them: “don’t worry about a thing.”

From that point on, the church community started to take care of the needs of this family. Dozens of parish families took turns cooking supper for this suffering family.

A parishioner took over the transportation needs, making sure that every one of the children had a ride to baseball or school or whatever. And when the time came, retired nurses and parish moms came and sat with the dying boy, so that his parents could get a good night’s sleep.

Years later, those parents kept repeating: “We didn’t have to worry about a thing.” And that was true. Whether it was food, or rides, or practical help – whatever they *needed* was *provided*... by people who were happy to help.

It’s the story of a Christian community actually living up to the high calling that Jesus articulates throughout the Gospel.

Now, I’m telling you that story because, when people hear the words of Jesus in today’s section of Matthew’s Gospel, they think that he is being naïve and unrealistic. Or... they think that he is

*lying.*

Whenever people think that Jesus is lying, we have to take that seriously.

And I *do* take it seriously, because Jesus says some outlandish things today as he continues to preach his famous “Sermon on the Mount.” Frankly, we’ve already heard some other outlandish things from Jesus in this sermon. You remember. Just a few weeks ago we heard Jesus say, “Blessed are you who mourn. Blessed are you when you’re persecuted.”

Then we heard Jesus say, “Anyone who is angry will be judged like a murderer.” And he said, “If you look at someone with lust, you’ve already committed adultery.”

And then Jesus said, “Turn the other cheek. Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you.”

This sermon is full of demanding, outlandish statements.

And today, Jesus has the audacity to say, “Don’t worry! Don’t worry about what you’re going to eat or drink or wear. God will provide! Don’t worry! God takes care of the flowers – he’ll give you what you need. Don’t worry! God already knows that you need food and don’t. Don’t worry.”

*O really?* “Don’t worry? God will provide?”

Tell *that* to the Christians in Syria, who are trapped between violent factions. Their children are dying. The adults are starving. It’s easy for Jesus to sit on a mountain and say, “Don’t worry.” But *today*, Christians all over the world are facing violence and hunger. Where is the God that Jesus so blithely promised would take care of us? Is Jesus lying?

*Don’t worry?* Tell that to some of the people who live within a half mile of this church. The elderly poor who live in the apartments back here. Some of them are isolated, and they face eviction because they can’t take care of themselves, and few seem interested in caring for them. Is Jesus lying to them?

*Don’t worry?* Tell that to the families in Henrico who have lived in this country for over 15 years. Their children were all born here. But now they are afraid of deportation! Is Jesus lying to them?

*Don’t worry?* Within the shadow of Nordstrom’s there are folks who can’t buy new clothes for their kids, or who can’t get to a doctor’s appointment. Within earshot of Wegman’s, there are

families who do not know how to feed their children.

And around the world, millions go to bed hungry each night. And Jesus keeps repeating, “Don’t worry. God will feed and clothe and care for you.” Oh yeah?

In many ways, it seems that Jesus may have been lying when he promised that God would provide, and when he said “don’t worry about anything”

But then I remember that couple, and their son dying of a tumor. What did they keep saying? “*We didn’t have to worry about anything.*”

And *why didn’t they* have to worry about anything? Because they were surrounded by a community of Christians who knew that they were called to *love* like Christ and *serve* like Christ and *give* like Christ.

That couple with the dying son *did not have to worry* about their next meal, or the ride to the doctor, or a sleepless night – because their Christian neighbors understood another saying of Jesus: “whatsoever you do to the least of my sisters or brothers, you do for me.”

Yes – the promises of Jesus in today’s Gospel *are* outlandish. It is *crazy* for Jesus to say, “Don’t worry about what you will eat or drink or wear. God will take care of it and provide what you need.”

Crazy promises, at least if you are judging them based on how the world works right now.

But when Jesus came proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, he did not come so that the world could keep ‘working the way it always worked.’

Rather, Jesus came to inspire a group of people who would be equipped to *change* the way the world works. He formed a community of faith, where outlandish promises *could* come true. He formed a church where people understood – some days, I will be called upon to feed my neighbor, or drive their child to school, or sit up late at night with a little boy with a tumor. Some days, I will be called upon to give.

And other days, when I am not sure where my next meal is coming from, or where I will find the help I need... on *those* days, my brothers and sisters in Christ will make Christ’s amazing promises come true for me.

As we listen to the life-changing words of Jesus in this Sermon on the Mount, we have to keep something in mind: *all* of this depends on our willingness to become part of the community of

faith, centered on Jesus, where we can envision and experience a way of living in the world that is different than “how things have always been.”

If people go to bed hungry or thirsty; if people are still gripped by hate or lust; if people still suffer in isolation, this is not proof that Jesus is a liar, or that God has failed. It is a sign that we, the Body of Christ, are not living out the faith we profess.

I will only be able to ‘turn the other cheek’ if I live in a church community that teaches me the healing power of forgiveness.

I will only be able to love my enemies if I live in a church community that teaches me how to see Christ in everyone. Everyone.

And we will only experience the truth of Christ’s outlandish promises – that God will feed us when we’re deeply hungry, satisfy our thirst, and clothe our naked need, if we commit to being an active part of a church community where brothers and sisters show up at each other’s doors, and say with saving honesty, “don’t worry about a thing.”

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