

Thanksgiving, Year B, Gospel

FROM WORRY TO THANKSGIVING

Matthew 6:25-33

Thanksgiving Day

Analysis by Bruce K. Modahl

25“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26Look 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? 27And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 28And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, 29yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 30But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith? 31Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ 32For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed, your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.



DIAGNOSIS: Worry

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Everyday Worries

A mother says to her son as he prepares to return to college, “I know God will take care of you, but I figure I will help God out by worrying about you.”

A rising high school freshman surveys the assortment of notebooks, paper, pens, pencils, and other assorted school supplies arrayed on her desk. She says, “I’ve got everything I need. Now I have more time to worry.”

Such anodyne worries are the stuff of life, as are the items Jesus names in the Sermon on the Mount. We worry over wearing the right thing to an event or serving a good meal to our guests. Yes, life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. But it is at least these. Life requires food and the

body needs clothing.

It is not difficult to picture those with a recent job loss or hospitalization saying, "I considered the lilies and watched the birds, but they do not have the stack of bills piling up on the kitchen table that I do." We also know there are people in our own communities whose clothes are rags and who go days without their daily bread.

Our text begins with a therefore. Therefore, to understand these words it is necessary to look back on what went before.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Worrywarts

Jesus warns against banking our lives on that which cannot sustain our weight. That would include almsgiving, prayer, and fasting aimed at an appearance of piety that will satisfy God and impress our neighbors. He warns against accumulating wealth meant as a means to secure our lives. We shall always be worried since we can never be sure we have done enough or accumulated enough.

We use the term worry wart for someone who worries too much. I think of Luther who worried over his sins and went to confession numerous times every day. He was counting on his ability to confess everything as the key to his acceptance by God.

An interesting side note comes by way of the Columbia Journalism Review which shows the earliest use of the term worrywart was as the name of a character in Dell Comics from the 1920s. Worry Wart was a predecessor of Dennis the Menace who caused others to worry. [You can see Worry Wart's picture [HERE](#).]

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Worried to Death

Neither our pious efforts or successful bankrolling can hold the weight of our lives against that of the grave. It is for good

reason that the word worry is also used for what a wolf does when it grabs its prey by the throat. The wolf worries it to death.

[I do not think Jesus' intended to make people anxious because they worry too much. I believe he intended his words to comfort people not criticize them. Jesus' words are heard as comfort by those who realize they are not going to secure their lives by their bank accounts and their own efforts. His words force us to look away from ourselves. For debilitating penultimate anxieties that might mean looking away from ourselves to the help we receive from a doctor or counselor. Ultimately, we look away from ourselves to God.]

PROGNOSIS: Unbending Our Worries



Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Death's Worry Undone

We look away from ourselves to God, but we do not have to cast our gaze a great distance. Jesus promises that he is at our side in every worrying situation. Death is our greatest fear. Death's threat to undo us lies behind every other worry we have. At the cross Jesus took on our greatest fear. He died and rose from death. He did so to share his victory over death with us.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Trusting the Promise

We share his victory over death by trusting his promise that because he lives, we also shall live. We trust the promise that Jesus gives us his righteousness and takes our sin from us. By our baptism we are joined to Christ. In baptism we die with him. In baptism we are raised with him to new life, a very present new life, which extends into eternity. We come to the altar for God's Thanksgiving Meal. In this meal Jesus is bodily present with us in his flesh and blood. By Word and sacrament Jesus promises us those events and people causing us anxiety are not God. They cannot determine how our lives turn out. We live in Christ and in Christ we have an abundant life.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Everyday Worries of the Redeemed

Living in the abundance of God's blessings is Eucharistic living. Eucharistic living unbends our worries from ourselves to others. The word translated worry or anxiety shows up also in 1 Corinthians 12:24-25. Paul says that in the body of Christ the members are so arranged that the members have the same care for one another. In Philippians 2:20 Paul commends Timothy to his readers writing, "I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare."

Paul's use of the word suggests that the everyday worries of the redeemed turn outward to focus care and genuine concern for

others. Such care and concern turn into actions on behalf of others. In this way we strive on behalf of the kingdom of God to share the joy and hope of the kingdom.