

“THE FREUDIAN SLIP”

Matthew 6:24-34

Crossings Conference, Homily 5
January 25, 2012; Morning Prayer

You are hungry. You remember that cookie jar in the kitchen and decide to indulge yourself in a little late afternoon snack. You open the jar already imagining the taste of those chocolate chip cookies. But the jar is empty! No cookies! Who ate them? You turn around and standing there behind you looking up at you with a funny look on his face is your six-year-old.

“I didn’t do it! I didn’t eat those last four chocolate chip cookies!”

You are staring at the culprit. A slip of the tongue was as good as a confession of guilt.

We often call such an accidental slip of the tongue a “Freudian slip” after the great Austrian thinker and father of psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud. Freud theorized that buried deep within the subconscious of every person are urges and desires that control our thoughts and actions. We may not even be aware of them. We may want to keep them hidden. However, an occasional “slip of the tongue,” a “Freudian slip,” reveals the secret within.

At the center of our text is such a “Freudian slip:” worry. Worry is part of life. It comes with being human. A certain amount of worry is good. It motivates us to work hard and plan for the future. It keeps us on our toes. Of course, too much worry creates problems. Always fretting about what to eat and what to wear can become an unhealthy obsession.

But where do you draw the line? When does a healthy concern for the future become a self-destructive obsession about tomorrow?

Jesus is uninterested in making such distinctions. He offers no checklist by which to monitor our worry so that we can keep it under control. Instead, Jesus says any kind of worry, big or small, long or short, is a “Freudian slip,” a revelation of something much bigger, deeper and more dangerous within us: our lack of faith in God.

Any worry, fear or moment of anxiety reveals that we are First Commandment breakers. God demands that we have no other gods, that we fear and love God above anything else. We don't. We are always trying to serve two masters. It doesn't work.

We throw up our hands and scream, “Time out!” Jesus is over-reacting here. Since when is worrying about what I will wear to work or what I will cook for supper the equivalent breaking the First Commandment? This hardly seems like praying to some ugly stone statue!

Martin Luther's commentary on the First Commandment in his Large Catechism reminds us that we all have our gods. What do we fear, love and trust more than anything else? Over what are we anxious? What do we worry about? The answers to those questions are our “Freudian slips.” They reveal our masters. They expose who and what own us. They uncover our gods! That is what makes us different from a rock or a flower or a bird of the air. We are not prisoners of our genes or our circumstances. We “have to” make choices. We CANNOT NOT CHOOSE to believe in someone or something. We MUST have a god.

Jesus knew that his disciples were chronic worriers just like us. When he tells them not to worry, he is actually accusing them and us of being First Commandment breakers. “Look at the birds of the air . . . Consider the lilies of the field.” They

don't scurry about trying to keep up with the latest fashions. They don't have their days rise and fall on the Dow Jones average. They don't count calories or grams of fat to win the admiring glances of others. So why do we worry even though God says we are worth so much more than flowers and birds?

Because our hearts cling to them instead of God. They promise so much but are relentless tyrants who never stop demanding more and more, never letting us rest. They are the empty calories that forever leave us hungry. They are the fool's gold that leaves us stuck in our poverty.

BUT God will not give up on us even though we have repeatedly given up on Him. Jesus is clear and unequivocal about that. There is no "Freudian slip" here.

When Jesus says, "Strive for the Kingdom of God," he is talking about himself. He is inviting us to follow him. So that we will, he hangs out with all of us who fret, agonize, wring our hands and sweat what tomorrow might bring. To us who are unable not to worry, to us who shudder as God stands in judgment over our faithlessness, he says, "Never mind! You are mine! You are my sons and daughters! I forgive your sins, even your worry. All that worries you, that makes you tremble and will ultimately kill you, I will suffer them WITH you and FOR you."

Jesus did. He suffered and died. And God was so pleased that God raised Jesus from the dead to assure us that God will keep His promise no matter what. Nothing can keep His love from us.

Jesus gives us a God different from any other. In Jesus we have a God who will never give up on us, a God we can trust when everything else is falling part, a God who always gives us enough to keep on believing and never having to fear that tomorrow will leave us high and dry. This is the Kingdom of God and his righteousness.

With that Kingdom “all these things will be given to you,” things like peace of mind, confidence in the future, a willingness to love and a generous spirit that does not worry about tomorrow but freely gives itself away in the service of a frightened and worried world. Others may wring their hands and rend their hearts. Their anxiety pops up in all kinds of Freudian slips. They hide the fear that is lurking in their subconscious. But not us! We are following Jesus.

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