

**Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A  
(Mar. 2, 2014)**

**Don't Worry**

About 35 years ago when I was the pastor of St. Ignatius Church in Baltimore, one of our parishioners was in a very serious accident and as a result she lost the use of both her legs. I went one day to visit her in Johns Hopkins Hospital wondering on the way what I could possibly say to help her in this terrible situation.

Well I need not have worried. When I arrived and she began to talk with me, she said some of the most extraordinary things I have ever heard someone in her condition say. “Oh, Father,” she said, “Things could be so much worse. I am so lucky just to be alive. My legs don’t work right now but the rest of me does. I know that I am in the hands of the Lord and the Lord is looking out for me.”

Of course when I read this morning’s Gospel I immediately thought of her and of her wonderful trust and confidence in God. Jesus tells us in the Gospel, “Don’t worry. Don’t be anxious. Look at the birds of the air and the lilies of the field. You are worth much more than they are. If God takes care of the birds and the lilies just imagine how much more God is concerned about you.”

Now I have heard two reactions to that reading as well as to everything else Jesus is telling us in the Sermon on the Mount. One of them says, “But it’s impossible. Nobody could really do what Jesus is asking us to do. Could he really be serious?” Well, I’m sure he is serious. But at the same time he knows our weaknesses. He also knows that he is proposing some very high ideals. That’s what they are: ideals, something for us to strive for. We will probably never reach them perfectly, but the important thing is to keep trying with the grace of God and not being discouraged if we don’t seem to make it. Just think of the woman I told you about who had lost the use of her legs. “I am in the hands of the Lord.” That’s the attitude Jesus is encouraging.

The other reaction I have heard is this: Jesus tells us not to worry, not to be anxious. God will take care of us. We don’t have to do anything.

Is he really serious about that?" Well, that's not really what Jesus says. He says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be given you." Now what would happen if all of us sought first the Kingdom of God? We would all love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Those who are well off would take care of those who are poor and vulnerable, and there would be far less to worry about or to be anxious about in our world. So we really do have to do something. We have to seek first the Kingdom of God. We do that by being understanding, compassionate, forgiving, loving people. And again, if we all did that there would be far less to worry or be anxious about in our world.

The other notion that comes through strongly in our readings today is God's love for us. Remember what we heard from the prophet Isaiah, Zion says, "The Lord has forsaken me. The Lord has forgotten me." But God responds through the prophet, "Could a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you."

The fact is: God loves each and every one of us very, very much and there is nothing any one of us can do that will make God love us less. Sometimes it occurs to me that we don't think enough of God's love – or perhaps we don't trust it. Lent, you know, will begin this week. Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. We usually look for something to do to let God know that we appreciate his love and that we love him back. I suggest that for this Lent – and not just for Lent – we spend just a few minutes each day thanking God for his love and asking for the grace and the help to respond to that love as God wants us to. I feel sure that if we did that then we would soon find that we don't have to worry, we don't have to be anxious. But with God's help we will seek first the Kingdom of God and help one another not to worry and not to be anxious.