

# 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time - 02262017

## Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 82

### Reading 1 [Is 49:14-15](#)

Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me;  
my LORD has forgotten me."  
Can a mother forget her infant,  
be without tenderness for the child of her womb?  
Even should she forget,  
I will never forget you.

### Responsorial Psalm [Ps 62:2-3, 6-7, 8-9](#)

R. (6a) **Rest in God alone, my soul.**  
Only in God is my soul at rest;  
from him comes my salvation.  
He only is my rock and my salvation,  
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed at all.  
R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**  
Only in God be at rest, my soul,  
for from him comes my hope.  
He only is my rock and my salvation,  
my stronghold; I shall not be disturbed.  
R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**  
With God is my safety and my glory,  
he is the rock of my strength; my refuge is in God.  
Trust in him at all times, O my people!  
Pour out your hearts before him.  
R. **Rest in God alone, my soul.**

### Reading 2 [1 Cor 4:1-5](#)

Brothers and sisters:  
Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ  
and stewards of the mysteries of God.  
Now it is of course required of stewards  
that they be found trustworthy.  
It does not concern me in the least  
that I be judged by you or any human tribunal;  
I do not even pass judgment on myself;  
I am not conscious of anything against me,  
but I do not thereby stand acquitted;  
the one who judges me is the Lord.  
Therefore do not make any judgment before the  
appointed time,  
until the Lord comes,  
for he will bring to light what is hidden in darkness

and will manifest the motives of our hearts,  
and then everyone will receive praise from God.

### Alleluia [Hb 4:12](#)

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**  
The word of God is living and effective;  
discerning reflections and thoughts of the heart.  
R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

### Gospel [Mt 6:24-34](#)

Jesus said to his disciples:  
"No one can serve two masters.  
He will either hate one and love the other,  
or be devoted to one and despise the other.  
You cannot serve God and mammon.  
  
"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,  
what you will eat or drink,  
or about your body, what you will wear.  
Is not life more than food and the body more than  
clothing?  
Look at the birds in the sky;  
they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into  
barns,  
yet your heavenly Father feeds them.  
Are not you more important than they?  
Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to  
your life-span?  
Why are you anxious about clothes?  
Learn from the way the wild flowers grow.  
They do not work or spin.  
But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his  
splendor  
was clothed like one of them.  
If God so clothes the grass of the field,  
which grows today and is thrown into the oven  
tomorrow,  
will he not much more provide for you, O you of  
little faith?  
So do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?'  
or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?'  
All these things the pagans seek.  
Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.  
But seek first the kingdom of God and his  
righteousness,  
and all these things will be given you besides.  
Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take

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care of itself.  
Sufficient for a day is its own evil."

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When we read today's Gospel (from the Sermon on the Mount) we must be careful not to misinterpret its basic vision. Jesus is not telling us what to do, but rather is offering us something to receive. The wrong way to interpret this Gospel is to think Jesus is just saying, "Stop worrying." We all get this advice from people every day and it isn't very helpful. This is not what Jesus is saying. For remember, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is describing what a transformed human person is like. And what he is teaching us here is that as He begins to live His life in us, many of our anxieties will diminish and go away.

**The transformed human person trusts God** and is even able to see God's hand in the difficulties of life. It is this trust growing in us by God's grace that ultimately diminishes and removes fear. Trust God and fear diminishes. This is the gift that Jesus offers in this Gospel today.

**We can distinguish three particular aspects of anxiety that Jesus sets forth:** The Problem of Possessions, the Problem of Paternity, and the Problem of Priority. Let's examine each and see how the Lord wants to free us from them.

**1. The Problem of Possessions** – The text says, ***No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*** Mammon is variously understood as riches, greed, or possessions. In an extended sense it can refer to the agenda of the world, which is focused essentially on material things, and which ties our dignity to only those things.

**Whose slave are you?** The Lord is clear that we cannot serve mammon if we wish to serve God. The Greek word translated here as "serve" is δουλεύειν (*douleuein*), which more specifically means to "serve as a slave." We miss the strength of the text when we fail to notice the slavery aspect. It may happen in our culture that one works at a job, yet after work

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hours goes home and is free from obligations. Hence we tend to believe that we *CAN* serve both God and mammon. But the Greek word used here describes a slave, not a mere servant. And a slave is wholly given over to the will of his master. The Greek word is thus more intense than the English translation.

### **What the Lord is saying is,**

“Look, you’re either going to be a slave of the Lord or you’re going to be a slave of the world.” And the honest truth is that most people are slaves of the world, slaves of mammon, slaves to riches, greed, and the agendas associated with them. These worldly things tend to completely consume us so that when we hear of some demand from God, we feel overwhelmed, even angry that something “more” is required of us. Our anger at God is a sign that we are slaves to mammon.

**We are usually too proud to admit that we are slaves of the world,** but the fact is that most of us are, to a large extent. The world and its demands press on us, and take up nearly all the oxygen in our life. It is this terrible slavery

that is a huge source of our anxiety and from which the Lord offers to free us. The Lord describes the anxieties that flow from slavery to Mammon, slavery to the world, its riches, and its agenda:

*I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear..... Why are you anxious about clothes? Do not worry and say, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear?'*

**Still anxious!** For us who live in the Western World, the anxieties about merely *HAVING* such things may have receded a bit. We are well-supplied and may not worry *IF* we will have clothes, food, etc. But even though we have them in abundance, still we obsessively worry about them. For example, we worry if we have the *right* clothes, if they are in fashion, if they look good on us, etc. We worry that we eat too much salt or too much fat. Indeed many are quite obsessed about what they eat. We have never lived so long and been so healthy, yet we have never been so anxious about our health! It’s amazing

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when you think of it. We have plenty of food and still we worry about food! Worry, worry, worry. Anxiety about these things is a sign that we are slaves to them. Scripture says, *but as for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.* (Eccles 5:12)

**What the Lord offers us here is to live His life in us so that we will not be slaves to mammon, but slaves to Him.** We may not like the image of slavery, but I have news for you: we are so small and powerless that we are going to be slaves of someone; it might as well be the Lord! Being wholly devoted to the Lord and what pleases him breaks our obsession with the world, money, possessions, popularity, fashion, and the like.

As the Lord's life and His will begin to replace our own life and will, our obsession with the world's demands diminishes and its power is broken. As we grow into a deeper relationship with the Lord, our ties and concerns with worldly agendas fade. And as the ties are loosened, the anxiety diminishes.

You and I, in our flesh, are not going to stop worrying. But the

Lord, living His life in us, isn't worried at all. And as His power and influence over us grows, the worries lessen, and the anxiety goes.

**This is the gift the Lord is offering** if we but let him take greater possession of our hearts. How do we do this? Through the medicine of prayer, the Sacraments, daily doses of Scripture, and spiritual reading. Gradually the Lord's heart, mind, and will transform *our* heart, mind, and will to be like His own.

**2. The Problem of Paternity** – The Lord Jesus wants to draw us to a deeper relationship with his Father. It remains a common spiritual problem that even those who develop something of a relationship with Jesus, still find the Eternal Father to be distant or remote or absent. To many, the Father is a stranger. They have surely heard of Him and read of Him in the Scriptures. But he is stranger. Some even have a sort of fear of him. There are Old Testament texts that may come to mind, or perhaps some people struggle because their earthly Father was either stern or remote.

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Whatever the problem, the Lord Jesus wants to lead to us His Father. Note that the phrase, "*your heavenly Father*" occurs twice in this passage and four times in Chapter 6 overall. There are two other references to the Father as "God" in today's gospel, and it is in Chapter 6 of Matthew that Jesus teaches us the "Our Father."

**Now all of these references to the Father, in close proximity to the invitation, "Do not worry," cannot be overlooked.**

There is to be seen here an antidote to anxiety in having a closer relationship with the Heavenly Father. Our Heavenly Father *knows what we need*. He cares for birds, flowers, and countless other things, and thus he is willing and able to care for us. To embrace and experience His love for us is to experience a lessening in anxiety.

**And though you and I** may not be able to dismiss our fears and anxieties by a simple act of the will; to the degree that our "Father-God" is near and we feel his presence, our fears eventually subside.

**Here is a critical gift that Jesus wants to give us:** a deep, personal experience of, and love for his Father. It is our perceived distance from the Father that causes our anxiety. But when we truly experience that our Heavenly Father "knows what we need," we find our fears melting away.

**Seek this gift from Jesus** that his Father will be known and loved by you, that His presence will be close at hand. And then watch your fears melt away. The Lord Jesus can do this for us. Take time and read the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) slowly, and realize that the parable is really about the Father more than it is about the sons. Jesus is saying, "This is what my Father is like."

**3. The Problem of Priority.** The Text says: ***But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides.*** One of our greatest struggles is to have proper priorities and in the end, to do just one thing. This third matter (priority) is not unlike the first (possessions), but it is more about

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choices and direction rather than things and allegiances.

**The simple truth is that we have a lot of trouble deciding what is most important** and how to make good decisions. This causes a lot of grief and anxiety for us. We want too many things. We want to please too many people. We are too easily distracted from our goal. In many ways we have not even fully clarified our goal.

**What is it that you want?** What is the one thing that really guides every other thing you do? Now be honest! You may say "God." You may say "the world," or maybe "my career." But the fact is, a lot of people don't really have a clear answer as to what the one thing they want is. The fact is they want a *lot* of things, and have never really sat down and determined the *one overarching* goal of their life. And thus they run about chasing this thing and that, and experiencing lots of anxiety along the way.

**Imagine a man** driving north to New York from Philadelphia. He knows that New York is his destination. Along the way he sees lots of signs but is quickly able to

determine which ones pertain to his journey and which ones can be ignored. If he sees a sign that says, "*95 South Baltimore*," he ignores it and experiences no anxiety at all about doing so.

**But now imagine another man** who is not sure where he is going. It may be New York or it may be somewhere else. He just isn't all that sure. Frankly, he hasn't thought about it all that much and just sort of lets life happen. Now HE sees the sign for "*95 South Richmond*" and struggles to know if he should take it or not. The sign makes him anxious. It is a fork in the road and he is not sure what to do. Should he take it, or not? And even if he does finally make a choice, he wonders if he did the right thing. His choice only heightens his anxiety. He made a choice but keeps looking back, second-guessing, and wondering. Yes, he is anxious because he has not sought first to determine his real destination.

**Many live this way today.** They have no real priority, no definite choice. And even if they have some vague direction (e.g., "I want

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to be happy") they have little idea what it really takes to get there. And frankly, they don't *want* to know the specifics all that much. Commitments and decisions are avoided. But, strangely, in trying to avoid a decision or commitment, they are not any less anxious; in fact they are *more* anxious. Every intersection is bewildering: "What should I do?"

**Now the Lord wants to save us all this anxiety** and thus offers us the grace to become clear about what we want and where we are going. As He begins to live His life more fully in us, our mind gets clearer; our heart desires with greater clarity. When Jesus' own life begins to replace our own, we want what He wants. And He wants the Kingdom and its values. He loves his Father and everyone and everything that His Father loves.

And so do we. By grace and by degrees the Lord begins to change us, to clarify things for us, and increasingly our life becomes about only one thing: "*I want to die and leave this world loving God and His kingdom. I want to be with him forever.*"

**Received, not achieved** – In all three of these areas please remember that the Lord is not merely saying to us that through our own power we must serve only God, experience Him as Father (Abba), and seek first the Kingdom of God. If it depended on us, it would last twenty minutes (max)!

No, what the Lord is doing here is painting a picture of the transformed human person and what we will increasingly experience if we let Him live His life in us and transform us in stages. This work begins in us and continues when we get down on our knees and beg the Lord to do it. It begins and continues when we are serious about having a steady diet of prayer, Scripture, Church teaching, the Sacraments, Holy Mass, and holy fellowship.

Now if you want to stay anxious and fretful, fine; you can have all my turns. But if you seek serenity, then ask the Lord into your life; re-invite him every day. Stay faithful to spiritual practices. And if you do, I promise you (I am a witness), you will see your anxieties lessen, your fears abate, your serenity

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grow, and your confidence  
strengthen. The choice is yours.