

11.22.2018 Thanksgiving Day (Matthew 6:25)

A boy was once asked to pray before his family began to eat dinner. As he bowed his head to pray, he looked at what was on his plate. Then, closing his eyes he prayed, "Lord, I don't like the looks of it, but I'll thank you and eat it anyway."

Kids say the funniest things, but this kid has it right, his prayer is an important lesson in the Christian life. God does not always set in front of us exactly what we want. It's not always easy to be thankful. In this difficult world it's much easier to feel anxious, worried, or distressed as we consider everything that is piled up on our plate, and I believe that's where Jesus meets us this morning. In the midst of our worry and fear, He says, "*Be not anxious for your life*" (Matthew 6:25). In our Gospel reading He speaks to a particular audience and lists such things as: What you will eat, what you will drink, or what you will wear; but this morning He speaks personally to each one of us. Whatever you are facing today: physical pain, sickness, family troubles, financial difficulties, loneliness, heartache, trials, or sorrow... In all of these things, to me and to you, Jesus says, "*Be not anxious for your life.*"

It's often difficult to follow our Lord's command and turn from anxiety to thankfulness, but in word and in deed St. Paul offers hope to those who find themselves in the midst of this struggle. The Word of God spoken through Paul tells us to, "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Paul was not only inspired to write these words, his life experience stands as historic evidence of their validity. He describes some of the trials he endured in a letter to the Corinthians. It was there that he wrote, "*Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.*" There is no question, Paul experienced unthinkable trials and sorrows. He tells us to give thanks in all circumstances – not as a man who has never been there – but as a brother who knows what it means to suffer.

Another man who turned from fear and anxiety, and chose to be truly thankful in every circumstance was German Archdeacon Martin Rinkart. I've shared his story before, but it more than merits repeating. In the 1600's, he served in the walled town of Eilenburg during the horrors of the Thirty Years' War. During the war, Eilenburg became an overcrowded refuge for the surrounding area and the refugees suffered from disease and famine. At the beginning of 1637, there were four ministers in Eilenburg, but one abandoned his post to serve in a better area and Martin Rinkart officiated at the funerals of the other two. As the only minister left, he often conducted burial services for as many as 40 to 50 people a day— almost 5,000 people in all – and in May of that year, his own wife died. Yet living in a world dominated by death, he wrote a prayer of thanksgiving for

his children to offer to the Lord. Picture this man, and his children, in such tragic circumstances praying these words:

Now thank we all our God, With heart and hands and voices;
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices.
Who, from our mother's arms, Hath led us on our way
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.

This thankful prayer, written in the midst of such heartache, was later set to music and this morning we will sing these words as we close our service. As we do so, may we remember when and where these words were written. May we consider this example and recognize the truth that thankfulness to God is not a self-centered appreciation for the things God does for us, but a God-centered appreciation for the faithfulness of God in this life and in the next.

The timeless reality of God's faithfulness, the eternal truth that He still is ours today is at the heart of what Jesus is saying when He speaks the words, "*Be not anxious for your life...*" In that phrase our Lord is directing us to place our lives in the Omnipotent hand of Almighty God. Once again, He wants us to remember who we are, and Whose we are. No matter the trials we face, no matter how we may feel, we are the beloved children of God, and though there will always be days when we don't like the looks of what's on our plate, we must approach our Father with the humble, obedient faith of a child (Matthew 18:3) "*giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Ephesians 5:20).