

DO NOT WORRY ABOUT YOUR LIFE

Almighty and gracious Father, we give you thanks for the fruits of the earth in their season and for the labors of those who harvest them. Make us, we pray, faithful stewards of your great bounty, for the provision of our necessities and the relief of all who are in need, to the glory of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

A Collect for Thanksgiving Day, The Book of Common Prayer

THANKSGIVING DAY

Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65:9-14; Philippians 4:4-9; Matthew 6:25-33

NOVEMBER 23, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

THE REV. RANDALL C.K. DAY, D.MIN., PRIEST AND RECTOR

THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 6:25-33

Jesus said, "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? Look 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? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But 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? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

In his daily meditation¹, Fr. Richard Rohr quotes the Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh, who teaches the wisdom of presence, of not worrying about our lives, of considering the birds of the air, the lilies of the field as Jesus teaches. Thich Nhat Hanh offers this wisdom through the ceremony and meditation of tea (that can be seen as a Buddhist parallel to the

Christian Eucharist):

"You must be completely awake in the present to enjoy the tea.

"Only in the awareness of the present, can your hands feel the pleasant warmth of the cup.

"Only in the present, can you savor the aroma, taste the sweetness, appreciate the delicacy.

“If you are ruminating about the past, or worrying about the future, you will completely miss the experience of enjoying the cup of tea.

“You will look down at the cup, and the tea will be gone.

“Life is like that.

“If you are not fully present, you will look around and it will be gone.

“You will have missed the feel, the aroma, the delicacy and beauty of life.

“It will seem to be speeding past you. The past is finished.

“Learn from it and let it go.

“The future is not even here yet. Plan for it, but do not waste your time worrying about it.

“Worrying is worthless.

“When you stop ruminating about what has already happened, when you stop worrying about what might never happen, then you will be in the present moment.

“Then you will begin to experience joy in life.²”

When we reflect on the Thanksgiving story of the pilgrims and the Wampanoag people gathering for a meal in gratitude for the pilgrims having survived their ocean crossing, first winter, and the stresses of initially establishing themselves in what was, to them, a new world, we often

speak of their quest for religious freedom.

True freedom both from religion and within spiritual life and community is recognizing that God is not enshrined in certain ideas about God nor in institutions that can be manipulated or coopted for human purposes (some of those purposes being honorable and worthwhile, of course). Freedom from religion and within spiritual life and faith community – and in the life of the wider community – is awakening to the reality that God is simply and wholly present and available absolutely all the time for all people.

There doesn't have to be an idyllic glow, by the way. Fr. Richard quotes spiritual writer Eckhart Tolle saying: “Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness. How do you know this is the experience you need? Because this is the experience you are having at the moment.”

So being attentive, deeply and specifically awake, to what is actually happening, even if it is chaos and stress and mess, is the open door to consciousness of the full, free presence of God now.

This day gives us many opportunities to embrace, first of all, the full sacred reality in which we live, in what we are actually

doing this Thanksgiving among family, friends, maybe strangers in the kitchen, at table, and to take in, experience, the moment by moment array of details: what we see and touch, the scent, the sounds, the movement, to realize the connections of the food we eat with the earth, with other people who planted, grew, harvested and transported, prepared, the wonder and complexity and change that is present and in constant motion all the time.

All God. God who is free. God who is free for us and for all.

Like the tea ceremony, this Eucharist now gives us opportunity to practice, to literally rehearse and attune ourselves to God's constant and abundant generosity to us and to all. We are present for the Presence, move toward it, reach

out our hands, open our lives, and God's own self feeds us with God in the risen Christ, and makes us this Presence in the world for ourselves and for others.

Of course no one needs to notice any of this. We don't have to strive or struggle to make any of it happen. We don't need to worry about our lives.

Thich Nhat Hanh writes: You will look down at the cup, and the tea will be gone.

Life is like that.

It is. We have experienced it that way and surely will again. It is part of being human.

And yet today, now, we can look down at the cup and see that it is full.

Life is also like that

¹ See <https://cac.org/category/daily-meditations/> to sign up or to read archives of previous meditations.

² See Evan Sutter, *Solitude: How Doing Nothing Can Change the World* (Tenth Street Press: 2015), 147-148 and Thich Nhat Hanh *Present Moment Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living* (Parallax Press: 2002).



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