

St Chad's Church, Sunderland

Pontus Bramberg

2nd Sunday before Lent (Sexagesima), AD 2023

May I speak in the name of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The words of Our Lord in today's Gospel reading are familiar to many of us yet at times they can be difficult. I for one sometimes feel like I worry about everything and I am sure many of you do as well. This may have been particularly true for a lot of people in recent months; I think especially about the ongoing financial crisis. While some encouraging signs have been starting to show in the last few days and weeks it is difficult not to worry. This crisis affects all of us but it is of particular concern for those whose finances were already stretched. The situation of the poor in the time of Christ was not any better and at first glance this passage may seem to be somewhat out of touch, especially given the immense care for the poor otherwise shown by the Lord. This, of course, is not the case; in fact, His teaching becomes even more poignant in difficult times. When things are going well we are not especially inclined to worry but the Lord tells us not to worry even when times are difficult. A private in the army may follow the orders of his superior perfectly but this is not particularly laudable if the orders are exactly what he would have done anyway. Like the private, the real test comes when something is difficult. We must trust in God even, perhaps especially, in difficult times. We are not only told not to worry when there is nothing to worry about but also when there is something that may warrant worrying. It is in difficult times that our true colours show; our real ambitions, often hidden, float to the surface.

Why then does Our Lord tell us not to worry? Three reasons come to mind. The first is that worrying is unnecessary. Our Lord tells us that our heavenly Father knows what we need even before we ask Him. We therefore do not need to worry about our needs, not because they are not needs but because the very God who created the universe out of nothing is personally our loving and competent Father; he knows what we need, loves us more than we can imagine, and is more than capable of taking care of us and our needs. The second reason: worrying is not helpful. None of our concerns are helped by worrying about them. Worrying will not cause us to live longer or fill up our bank accounts. If anything it induces anxiety which probably shortens our life expectancy. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, worrying is not trusting. Christ does not mince words when He says 'you of little faith' [Matt 6:30]. In this passage faith is not some particular technical term but simply means trust. Whenever we worry we are living as though we are navigating our difficulties entirely on our own. We trust the engineers designing the bridges we drive on to know what they are doing in building a safe bridge. Should not our trust for God be much greater than this?

There is however another issue at hand in this passage about worrying: ambition. Am-

bition is about the direction of our life; in one way or another all of us are aiming at something, chasing after something, or at least hoping for something. But what is it we are striving for? Our ambitions are betrayed when we worry. Our Lord plainly tells us that it is the Gentiles, those who do not know God, who strive for food, drink, and clothing [Matt 6:31-32]. The lives of the Gentiles are focused on these things but as believers in Christ we can live for more than that as Our Lord alludes to in the beginning of our passage [Matt 6:25]. The Lord also tells us what this greater good to live for is: the kingdom of God and His righteousness [Matt 6:33]. This is what we should be seeking first and foremost. The kingdom of God and His righteousness are everlasting and will not perish like all earthly goods. Likewise our bodies will perish but the soul lives forever.

Ultimately it is a matter of faith. Do we believe that God loves us and is capable of providing for us? If so, there is no point in worrying about earthly problems. Seeking the kingdom of God should be our priority because repenting of our sins and believing in Christ is ultimately what will save us from everlasting damnation and allow us to enter the everlasting kingdom of God. This is not to say that we will burn in Hell for all eternity if we occasionally worry a bit or even a lot; God recognises our weakness and is always ready to forgive and to help us along the way. Accept God into your hearts and let your whole lives be a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Him who is greater than all of us: our heavenly Father, the creator of Heaven and Earth. Do this especially through unceasing prayer: I particularly recommend the offices of Morning and Evening Prayer but if that seems daunting the Jesus Prayer can be said at any time and is very short: 'Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner'. God is worthy of more prayer, both of supplication and thanksgiving, than any of us can ever hope to offer but He does not expect more than we are able to give.

Amen.