

THE EMMAUS SERIES

8th Sunday, Year A

Isaiah 49:14-15; 1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Matthew 6:24-34

Do not worry about tomorrow

Our gospel readings from the 'Sermon on the mount' are coming to an end. Today's passage is a familiar one: 'Look at the birds in the sky ... Think of the flowers in the field', Jesus declares, 'How much more will God look after you, you people of little faith'. These memorable words are in danger of becoming little more than a comforting sentimentality if they are not set within the challenging program of the whole 'Sermon on the Mount'.

Note that the passage chosen for today's liturgy has as its introduction the pithy parable about the impossibility of 'serving two masters'. If we recall the teaching of Jesus we have been following, this passage can be read as a commentary on the first Beatitude, with which the 'Sermon on the Mount' began: 'How happy are the poor in spirit'. As they share their journey of life with Jesus, his true followers find the joy of an undivided heart: 'Set your hearts on the Father's kingdom first', Jesus concluded, 'and on God's saving justice and all these other things will be given to you as well'. (The version in the lectionary follows the Jerusalem Bible translation. The New Jerusalem Bible translation is quoted here. This change clarifies something basic to Christian faith. God's 'saving justice' is the divine rectitude which will heal, reconcile, restore in undeserved generosity. The Christian's undivided heart is filled with confidence in this 'saving justice').

Looking back on the charter outlined by Jesus we will recognise that from beginning to end it presupposes the Good News that was the essential message of all his teaching, the astounding truth in which the whole story of creation is grounded, the absolutely gratuitous but boundless generosity of the eternal Father. The first reading, from the Isaian writings, has been chosen because its astounding declaration, given through the prophet, reminds us of this background: 'Does a woman forget her baby at the breast ... Yet even if these forget, I will never forget you'. The first Christians took up their following of the Saviour in the same spirit, echoed in the words of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, 'Blessed by God the Father ... Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ' (1:3)

John Thornhill sm