

Homily on Sunday 23rd February 2025 - Choral Evensong.

Text: Matthew 6: 25 – end.

Title: First priority is to trust in our Heavenly Father.

One day I read that “if you have more than three main priorities in life, you do not have any”. Indeed, there are as many priorities as the number of human beings, but in general these three main priorities are: your health, relationships, and purpose. We are going to talk about necessities and priorities.

Chapters 5 to 7 of the Gospel of St. Matthews include the so-called sermon on the mount, which has given ethical inspiration to many and challenged countless Christians and non-Christians. The sermon on the mount is the first of five major sermons included in the Gospel of St. Matthews, and it is especially focused on discipleship and the kingdom of God. In fact, it can be described as the manifesto of the kingdom of God, containing the whole of life: relationships; religion and prayer; or riches and material needs, which is precisely our main theme today.

The passage of this evening speaks to us about the disciples’ attitude to material needs and possessions.

Jesus teaches his disciples about avoiding **feeling worry**, even facing the simplest human needs and concerns like food, drink, or clothes, calling them to first trust in God. He uses the simple and beautiful analogy of the **birds and wildflowers**, and the assumption that God’s people are much more important to him than the rest of his creation. Jesus gives trust to the disciples.

Birds neither sow or reap nor gather into barns, but the heavenly Father feeds them. The lilies of the field grow, and God clothes the grass of the field, `...which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven`. Much more God will care for them.

Indeed, food and drink maintain life, and clothes protect the body, but clearly neither food nor clothing is an end in itself. It is the “life” and “body” for which they provide that ultimately matter, which is finally the object of God’s concern. Not only is life more than food which sustains it, but it also consists of much “more.” A life which is dominated by worry about food is missing that “more” as the quest of God’s righteousness. The heavenly Father, God creator, and sustainer of a beautiful universe can be trusted to meet his disciples’ essential needs. Worry may be the antithesis of the practical trust in God, which is the essential meaning of faith.

According to St. Matthews, the most important message of this passage, not only two thousand years ago but also today, is about “**priority**”, which is made clear by Jesus’ call to ‘**Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness**’. The disciple’s deepest wish and resolve must be to live in God’s way. “Seeking the Kingdom of God and his righteousness”, as a higher goal in life. It involves high standards of ethics, and most importantly the purity of heart.

Many theologians understand that Jesus is setting an impossible standard in the sermon on the mount to show us our need for divine mercy and grace. In fact, righteousness has often been understood denoting a standard of moral perfection towards which human beings must strive, but they can never fulfil.

Human beings are called to trust in Christ who is in person the righteousness of God.

What is the meaning of this message for us today?

For all, and for each one of us, righteousness means **living in the right relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation**. We act with righteousness when we live honestly, justly, and faithfully according to God’s instruction. It implies to sincerely try to live under God’s commandments. For us, Scripture is the road map, and it provides the knowledge for how one must live to please God, and finally to be used by God.

Living in the right relationship with God. Loving and praising God with prayers and through public and private worship. Prayer is a personal experience of knowing God and putting oneself under the power of God. Through prayer we open ourselves to God’s creative activity in human affairs. We must pray for the grace of God, helping us to walk the path of righteousness.

Living in the right relationship with other people. Jesus in the Beatitudes sets out how people should live, acting justly, being humble in spirit, merciful, pure in heart or being peacemakers. Jesus also spoke clearly about our individual responsibility to bring justice by loving our neighbours as ourselves, loving one another, and caring for those in need in our communities or marginalised on the edge of our society.

Living in the right relationship with all creation. Care for environment, care for God’s creation! Acting for the climate is not only a matter of conserving what we love, but it is a matter of justice for entire communities in areas of the world, for fellow creatures and for nature entrusted to us by God. We can also make prayers for climate justice a priority and we can make our voices heard safeguarding our world. As we know, Eco-church award -going for gold- is a

simple model by which church communities can take steps towards reducing the church's carbon footprint and helping biodiversity.

In the XVI century, the English priest **Richard Hooker** [Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity] was a pioneer on the Anglican understanding of ecclesial authority and the so-called "Anglican Conscience", adding a moral reasoning in the interplay between Scripture, Tradition and Reason, and using reason to discern the applicability of some texts to our present situation. He made clear that Scripture has priority and contains all that is needed for salvation, but 'reason' is something in us given by God. In the Anglican conscience the fundamental norm is "love for God and love for the neighbour." We love our God praising God, caring for his creation, and loving our neighbour.

Our heavenly Father knows that we need food, clothing among many other necessities, but our priority is to live right in the relationship with God, with other people -close or distant to us-, and with all creation. We need to trust in God!

Finally, I would like to finish with the Letter of Paul to the Philippians (4:6-7). **'Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus'.**

Amen.