

One of my friends from Seminary who was fond of saying provocative things, once said to me he thought most of the Church's problems come from the fact that we do not live like the apocalyptic sect that we are. I might not have put it so bluntly, but I think he's right.

One of the basic convictions of our faith is that Christ will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. That means we live like people who live in between, at the turning point of the ages. We never have the luxury of settling down and getting used to things the way they are, because God's Word, Jesus Christ, is always calling us forward with the promise of the kingdom, where God's reign is perfect. That's both the great comfort and the great challenge of being a Christian.

It's a comfort, because it means that however bad things might get, however nervous you may be about the next election, or your medical problems, or your children, Jesus reassures us: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Really we should start a few verses earlier. "Jesus said: do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying... Instead, strive for [the] kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Lk 12:29-32).

There's a great tenderness to this, as Jesus addresses us, his anxious little flock. If we are seeking God's kingdom, that is seeking God, following and trusting in him, and earnestly looking for his reign on earth, then we can trust that in God's kingdom, all our needs will be met. And the kingdom, as it turns out, is a sure thing. Whoever seeks the kingdom of God is guaranteed to find it, because our Father is eager to give it to us. All we have to do is ask.

There is also a challenge that goes along with this though. We have to "be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks."

There's a stupid bumper sticker I've seen that says "Jesus is coming, look busy." It sounds like that's what Jesus is saying. On the other hand, I think there's a sense in which he's saying just the opposite. It's the world that wants us to look busy,

and it's just this busyness that threatens to overwhelm us and draw our attention away from God and his kingdom. It's the world that accuses us of wasting time and energy on foolish things when we invest ourselves in the Kingdom of God.

God offers us peace – true peace, but it's a peace that we have to keep choosing day by day. We are people living in the in between time, living as citizens of a kingdom that hasn't arrived yet, and at the same time we are called to love the people around us. Strangers, immigrants and exiles almost always find it easier in the long run to settle down and fit into their new surroundings. The world surrounds us with things that demand our attention – good things and bad – and it is just easier to settle in.

The problem of course, is while that's easier, it's also incredibly sad. Settling into the World as it is, means settling for the World and all its routines. It means accepting all the imperfections and injustices, all the losses and regrets of this life, and just trying for "good enough." It means spending ourselves on things that can never satisfy us, on money, on politics, on entertainment, or even on doing good deeds without any assurance that they will actually make the world a better place. The Word of God interrupts all those routines, with the promise of God's Kingdom.

It is the promise that the world is going to be different one day and that all the grief, disappointments and evil will come to an end. We have to live knowing that some of the things that the world thinks are so important now, that seem terribly important to us, won't matter one day. We need to live our lives in a way that only makes sense if the gospel is true – that looks at least a little bit foolish to our non-Christian neighbors.

So how do we do that? Well, Jesus has plenty of very concrete suggestions and we could certainly do worse than reading the sermon on the mount. But in the gospel today, he suggests one thing in particular. "Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "

Now, I don't think that Jesus is saying everyone has to sell everything they own; that has never been a universal practice in the Church, even though some people are called to radical poverty.

On the other hand, we should be careful of over-spiritualizing what Jesus is saying here. One of the basic ways we can begin to live differently from the world is in how we use our money and our resources.

This isn't a stewardship sermon, so I'm not saying give more to the Church – although that's a way to give. The emphasis here is on giving generously, because money has a powerful hold on our hearts. The more we invest in something, the more we care about it. This is true of any resource, whether money or time or creativity. That means though, that if we want to shift the way we think and live, if we want our focus to be on the Kingdom of God and not on the World, we have to invest our resources in the kingdom of God.

The more we give, the more we love, and the more we love the more we want to give. "Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be." This can take all sorts of forms. It could mean taking the risk of actually tithing a full ten percent. It could mean giving up some favorite activity to be of service to another person. Whatever form it takes though, it means taking a risk on the promises of God, giving a little more than we are comfortable with giving. It's only by trusting God that we learn we can trust him, and stop relying so much on the World for our security and safety. But, as I and so many others here could testify, he doesn't disappoint. When we take risks for the kingdom of God, we may sustain some losses, but in the end they will always be more than compensated by the joy, the peace and the abundance that God offers.