

THE FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Matthew 6:24-34

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

The first commandment declares, *“You shall have no other gods before Me.”* However, just what does this mean? Well, as we learn from our Small Catechism, it means that we should *“fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”* (Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, The Ten Commandments)

Sounds simple enough, does it not? All that God requires of you is that you put God before all things, and I am sure that each and every one of you does that—all the time. Do you not? JESUS gives you your priorities, *“Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness,”* and like dutiful Christian soldiers, you salute smartly and do exactly as you are told. Am I right or am I wrong?

Well, to paraphrase the words of our 42nd President, I suppose that all depends on your meaning of God. And by that, I mean is your god the God of Holy Scripture or something or someone else?

You see, the God of Holy Scripture is not a god of your making. He has not been fashioned in your image. He is not the cute, warm, fuzzy, cuddly god so often presented in contemporary Christianity, for He is God Almighty, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God who said, *“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.”* He destroyed the world in the Great Flood and laid waste to Sodom and Gomorrah. He is the God who parted the Red Sea and drowned Pharaoh and his armies.

Yet, He is also a God of infinite compassion; the God who said, *[“I will show] mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”* He is the God who gave His Holy Law to us through

Moses, and He is the God who multiplied the widow's flour and oil in Zarephath and returned to her, her son from death. He is the God who loves you in such a way that He sent His one and only Son as a sacrifice so that He may claim you as His own.

This is the God that we are to *“fear, love, and trust above all things.”* He is a *“jealous God”* and will not share His children's adoration with anyone or anything else.

Through our Gospel text appointed for today, JESUS tells us, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”* What our LORD here implies is self-evident: No man is his own master.

Because of our inborn corruption brought about by the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, every single motivation of every man's heart and will are subject to the sinful desire for someone or something outside of God: be it power, money, sex, comfort, what have you—so much so, that our every thought, word, and deed are made subject to that end.

In other words, we all have our *“master”* or *“masters.”* We all have impure desires and ambitions that drive and motivate us. The question is by whom or by what are we motivated, whom or what drives us, or just who or what is truly our master? In whom or what do you place your trust?

Therefore, in effect, we are left with only two options. There are only two masters, two gods if you will. To which god do *you* cling? Which is *your* god? The sainted Dr. Martin Luther tells us: *If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your God.* (The First Commandment, Martin Luther's Large Catechism)

Yes, there are only two gods, a false god, and the One True God. One god has many names and faces, as many as you could possibly want or even imagine. You can call him *“god,”* or *“Mammon,”* or simply make up a new

name. This god does not mind. He is open-minded and will gladly go along with anything you desire. He conducts himself as the gentlest and noblest of all masters, existing only to better the existence of his servants, finding commonality among all religions and denominations, believers and unbelievers alike, seeking peace and prosperity regardless of the cost.

This god's byword is tolerance. You see, he does not have a jealous bone in his body. He is quite modern and open-minded, progressive, sensitive, and enlightened—in touch with his feelings, and yours. He makes not one demand of his servants. He has no strict doctrine or moral code. He is convenient, never embarrassing, never harsh, never confrontational, or condemning. He encourages his followers to enjoy themselves, to pamper themselves, to indulge themselves. He is never shocked by lewd behavior, deviancy, or perversion. He is flexible and willing to change his message to suit the moment. He promises hope and change, but nothing ever changes, and he has no real hope to offer. Life under this god is a plethora of personal choices and preferences. He embraces diversity and encourages freethinking. In his nonchalant way, this god glibly declares that his believers can have as many masters as they please.

But beware, this god is a liar! All his seeming niceties are nothing more than bait. He has set a trap. He deceives to enslave and eventually devour. He is patient and willing to bide his time, for in the velvet glove of his generosity is an iron fist that is only waiting for the right moment to crush and defeat those he has deceived. Under his sheepskin of tolerance are claws and teeth meant only for ripping, shredding, and tearing—for killing. He lures men to complacency with shallow sweet-nothings, just as domesticated animals are led to a bloody slaughter.

Nonetheless, most of the world has fallen prey to his deception. You see, this god appears very magnanimous, and he is far more attractive and much more acceptable to us than the “*other*” Master, the “*other*” God, the One of circumcision, sacrifice, suffering, and blood, the Master who is so old-fashioned and out of touch; the master who is quite conspicuously and embarrassingly jealous.

The “*other*” God will not permit multiple masters. He offends the sensitivities of fallen man. He calls them “*sinners*.” If you are thinking that this God is not very tolerant, you are correct. He tends to be unyielding, and uncompromising. He will not hear prayers in any other name than His own Name. He is the God of Truth, the God of Light, not of ambiguity and shadows, not of gray areas and blurred lines, not a god of syrupy promises, not of easy pleasure, but a God of discipline. His Word means what it says.

This God is Life. But He is found only in death—the death of the self. If you will be His, then you can belong to no other. You must die to yourself and the world with all its pleasures and temptations, and live for and in no other master but Him. But, take heart; you need no other, for no other is of any help, of any comfort or aid. JESUS is the **ONE TRUE GOD**, the *only* One, and He wants you. He is the God to whom you should cling. For “*no one can serve two masters.*”

But “*O you of little faith*” could it be that you have been deceived by that other master? Do you give worship to the false god? Repent! Turn instead to the true God who promises to give you all good things. “*Seek first the Kingdom of [the One True] God and His righteousness.*”

You see, even the simple birds of the air live lives which contradict *your* faith. Therefore, consider that “*they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them.*” The birds do not worry, they do not horde, they do not complain. The eyes of all birds wait upon the LORD, for they know that it is He who provides for all their needs, giving them their food in due season; they know, even more, than we who have been given the capacity to know so much more, seem to know. The birds of the air know it is God who opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing.

Thus, the piety of the creatures of the sky far surpasses your own. Their lives preach against you and just how little you truly trust in God.

For whom among you can truthfully say that you do not worry about some aspect of your life, especially in the world, as we know it today? Bills, food, mortgage payments, promotions, demotions, jobs, layoffs, investments, health, relationships, retirement, not to mention war and rumors of war; all

these worries press in upon you, causing you to look to anything and anyone but your God. For *your* eyes wait upon men and you place your confidence in princes (Gradual). Indeed, your eyes seem to wait upon everything but the LORD.

Just as the beasts of the air, so too, the beauty of the grass of the field preaches against you, but it does so that you might confess that, at heart, you do not really believe that our Father in heaven only wants the best for you, that when you pray, *“Give us this day our daily bread...”* you do not truly mean it, because you do not truly believe it.

The brainless grass and the pea-brained birds of the sky preach against us and declare that when push comes to shove, we fear, love, and trust in just about everything more than we fear, love, and trust in God.

He who has ears to hear, listen to the preaching of the birds and the proclamation of the flowers: hear, heed, repent, believe, and confess.

For these are they that preach with a silent eloquence unmatched by any human voice. They preach that the blessings of Almighty God are new every morning and that His mercy endures forever. These are they that preach that, while we can do nothing to deserve His love and grace, still He abundantly provides for all our wants of body and soul.

Therefore, do not worry, but cast your eyes upon God. Do not worry about what you shall eat. Shall you not eat of the Body of JESUS, *“who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the HOLY SPIRIT of the Virgin Mary and was made Man?”* Why worry about what you shall drink? Shall you not drink the Blood of JESUS, who *“was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, [who] suffered and was buried,”* who was executed for crimes He did not commit—for your crimes, that you would be set free? Will you not feast on JESUS, who, on *“the third day rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the FATHER”*? Nor is there any need to worry over what you shall wear. For you wear CHRIST’s righteousness, the garment of joy and salvation that He provides by Grace in Holy Baptism—a garment to which, *“even Solomon in all his glory,”* could not compare.

For what then, shall you worry? Nothing! For all things pale in comparison to this reality: God loves you in CHRIST JESUS and promises to remove you from this shadowy valley of pain, tears, and death and bring you to Himself in heaven.

Therefore, do not worry! You are of far more value than the birds of the air. Your FATHER in heaven feeds them, but His only-begotten Son did not die for them. He died for you. Your FATHER in heaven *“clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven...”* but His only-begotten SON did not die for the grass of the field. He died for you. He suffered the fiery wrath of God for you that you would be spared the fires of hell. JESUS suffered, bled, and died upon a cross so that you would have no need to worry about tomorrow. He rose again from the grave, that believing in Him, you will have an eternity of tomorrows.

“Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow....” For tomorrow never comes and *“sufficient for the day is its own troubles.”* You have no need to worry. JESUS has overcome the false master with all his lies. You have the true Master, the One True God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, and He has already declared you righteous with the words, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
AMEN.

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