

When you think about it, life's decisions are really about values and those values largely determine our choices and our priorities. Sometimes, we can have second thoughts and change our minds, before it is too late, but ultimately the way we lead our lives, the way we feel about ourselves, the way others view us and the way that God judges us is based on the decisions that we alone make, as we travel the journey of life. We have only one life; we want to live it well.

The Gospel reading from Matthew, today, is about values, choices and priorities. Jesus taught that our relationship with God must be our highest value, and building that relationship must be our highest priority. He said, "You cannot serve two masters." You can't have two top values. One or the other must come first. In the language of Matthew, the polarities are God and wealth, or in the more traditional phrasing, God and "mammon." We ought to understand this as not so much a choice between God and money as it is a choice between God and the tangible and intangible pleasures of life – home, career, friends and possessions, even ambitions and dreams. Jesus does not condemn these things, far from it. Our Lord enjoyed the pleasures of life. He was not a hermit, he was not an ascetic. But for Jesus, nothing ever took priority over his love devotion to God the Father and his service to humanity. This is the way Jesus is telling us that we should live life. This is what today's Gospel reading is all about. It's a timely message, because there is always the risk of putting life's secondary things first; it is just our human nature.

Jesus said that we should not worry about things, even life's necessities, because God will provide them for us. Can we take this literally and just sit back and wait for food and clothing to be dropped at our doorsteps? Of course we cannot. We live in a world that demands that we be responsible and productive, and we justly want far more than the basics. As human beings with skills, needs and emotions, we both want and deserve to live satisfying and rewarding lives. We are far above those other forms of life that need and desire only the basics – food, shelter, safety. We deserve to be happy, we deserve to be free and we deserve to have pleasure – but only if we are willing to strive towards these things, working to get them. But again, it boils down to priorities and our priorities are driven by our values. And so we have to ask ourselves, each and every day of our lives, where does God fit in? Is what I'm after what God wants for me? Am I demanding more than my share? Am I denying others?

Christian moral responsibility must be shaped by what we sometimes call our Lord's Summary of the Law, or the "Great Commandment." "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your strength. You shall also love your neighbor as yourself." The absolute, unequivocal love of God and neighbor must shape and mold our lives, our values and our choices if we are going to claim to be disciples of Jesus, but I think that we

can take comfort in the fact that God knows our needs, even before we ask, and it really is God's pleasure to shower us with his blessings.

What God asks of us, though, is to just keep things in balance. Seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness, and do so by loving God and neighbor. If we do this, I think we will be amazed at how the rest just seems to fall into place. *Amen.*

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