

Jim's Notes
October 11, 2006
The Gospel According to St. Matthew 6:25-34

Matthew 6:25

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Note that he did not simply say, "Don't be anxious for your life," but he added the reason and so commanded this. After having said, "You cannot serve God and mammon," he added, "Therefore I say to you, don't worry." Therefore? Why therefore? Because of the unspeakable loss. For the hurt you receive is not in riches only; rather, the wound is in the most vital parts, in the subversion of your salvation, casting you as it does away from the God who made you, cares for you and loves you. "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life." Only after Jesus has shown the hurt to be unspeakable, then and not before does he make the instruction stricter. He not only asks us to cast away what we have but also forbids us to take thought even for the food we need, saying, "Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat," not because the soul needs food, for it is incorporeal. He spoke figuratively. For though the soul as such needs no food, it cannot endure to remain in the body unless the body is fed. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 21.2)

Matthew 6:26

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

These examples are not to be analyzed like allegories. We must not inquire about the allegorical significance of the birds of the air or the lilies of the field. These examples are proposed so that more important things may be suggested from things of less importance. (Sermon on the Mount 2.15.52)

Matthew 6:27-30

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Do you see how Jesus clarifies what has been obscure by comparing it to what is self-evident? Can you add one cubit, or even the slightest measure, to your bodily life span by worrying about it? Can you by being anxious about food add moments to your life? Hence it is clear that it is not our diligence but the providence of God, even where we seem to be active, that finally accompanies everything. In the light of God's providence, none of our cares, anxieties, toils or any other such things will ever come to anything, but all will utterly pass away. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 21.3)

Note the acceleration of images: just when the lilies are decked out, he no longer calls them lilies but "grass of the field" (Matthew 6:30). He then points further to their vulnerable condition by saying, "which are here today." Then he does not merely say "and not tomorrow" but rather more callously "cast into the oven." These creatures are not merely "clothed" but "so clothed" in this way as to be later brought to nothing. Do you see how Jesus everywhere abounds in amplifications and intensifications? And he does so in order to press his points home. So then he adds, "Will he not much more clothe you?" The force of the emphasis is on "you" to indicate covertly how great is the

value set upon your personal existence and the concern God shows for you in particular. It is as though he were saying, "You, to whom he gave a soul, for whom he fashioned a body, for whose sake he made everything in creation, for whose sake he sent prophets, and gave the law, and wrought those innumerable good works, and for whose sake he gave up his only begotten Son." (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 22.1)

It is not until he has clearly revealed his affection that he proceeds also to reprove them, saying, "O you of little faith." For this is the quality of a wise counselor. He balances counsel and reproof, that he may awaken persons all the more to the force of his words. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 22.1)

Matthew 6:31-33

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

At first he makes it abundantly clear that these things are not to be sought as if they were for us the kind of blessings for the sake of which we ought to make all our actions good actions but that they are necessities nevertheless. Then Jesus says, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well." In this sentence he clearly shows the difference between a good that ought to be sought as an end and a value that ought to be seen as a means. Our final good is therefore the kingdom of God and his justice. We ought to seek this good and fix our aim upon it. Let us perform all our actions for the sake of it. Yet, since we are waging war in this life in order to be able to reach that kingdom and since this life cannot be maintained unless those necessities are supplied, he says, "These things shall be given you besides, but seek you first the kingdom of God and his justice." (Sermon on the Mount 2.16.53)

When he said that the one is to be sought first, Jesus clearly intimates that the other is to be sought later-not that it is to be sought at a later time but that it is to be sought as a thing of secondary importance. He showed that the one is to be sought as our good, that the other is to be sought as something needful for us, but that the needful is to be sought for the sake of the good. (Sermon on the Mount 2.16.53)

Matthew 6:34

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

With a single heart, therefore, and exclusively for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, we ought to do good to all. And in this well-doing we ought not to think about temporal rewards, either exclusively or conjointly with the kingdom of God. For it is with reference to all these temporal things that the Lord used the word tomorrow when he said, "Do not think about tomorrow." For that word is not used except in the realm of time, where the future succeeds the past. Therefore, when we perform any good deed, let us think about eternal things and pay no heed to the temporal. Then our deed will be not only good but also perfect. "For tomorrow," he says, "will have anxieties of its own." By this he means that you are to take food or drink or clothing when it is fitting that you do so. When the need for them is pressing, these things will be at hand; our Father knows that we need all these things. "For sufficient for the day," he says, "is its own evil." In other words, when the need is urgent, we have sufficient reason for using these things. I suppose that this necessity is called evil because it partakes of the nature of

punishment for us since it is part of the frailty and mortality that we have merited by committing sin. To this penalty of temporal necessity, therefore, do not add something more troublesome. (Sermon on the Mount 2.167-56)