

“A Greater Thanksgiving”

“Do not be anxious about anything,” the Lord says. Easier said than done. Has the Lord seen the deep division in our country – our loved ones who are dying – the deception and confusion that our children endure – the chaos at the border – the skeletons in my closet?

How can the Lord say such a thing? Does He really expect me not to be anxious about anything?

Dearly beloved, the Lord is not being unrealistic. He knows what He is talking about. After all, He has a lot of experience with sinners like us, living in a sinful world like this.

The Lord, who through His servant Paul, tells us not to be “anxious about anything” – is the same Lord who said the same thing to Israel of old.

“Do not be anxious about anything,” He said to Israel – while in bondage – and smashed up against the Red Sea, with Pharaoh’s armies hot on their heels – and at the foot of a shaking, smoking, lightening-struck Mt. Sinai – and in a harsh, not a crumb of food or drop of water, wilderness – a desolate place full of poisonous snakes, a golden calf, and self-centered people.

It is at Mt. Sinai (where Israel receives not only the Ten Commandments, but also the instructions concerning the Tabernacle and its Divine Service) – it’s there that they hear the words of our text for today.

Moses says: “The WHOLE commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers.”

It is the WHOLE commandment – the entirety of God’s Word given to them – that instructs them how to live. They are to remember this Word, and live by it – for it is a Word by which the Lord humbles them, tests them, and disciplines them.

Israel is humbled as the Lord allows them to remain in slavery for 430 years – a bondage that leads them to cry out to the Lord for mercy. In the same way He humbles you – letting your sin torment you as you live in its prison – until you realize your only deliverance is from the Lord, and you cry to Him for mercy.

The Lord humbled Israel by grinding up their golden calf and making them drink the bitterness of their idolatry. And so, He humbles you who seek other lords to trust, letting their bitter tyranny teach you were idolatry leads.

He tests them by means of daily bread – with the basic necessities of water, food and clothing – to see if they would look to Him to provide. So, you too are tested – often with abundance rather than scarcity – to see if you will realize the One who opens His hands to provide that bounty – and if you will in turn, give thanks to Him.

The Lord disciplined His children by means of poisonous snakes – to show how deadly their sin and impenitence is. To those wallowing in death, He gives a most “foolish” antidote for their fatal snake bites – a bronze snake lifted up on a pole. But with that visible element comes a Word of promise – that those who looked to that snake – would live.

The Son of Man has been lifted up on the pole of the cross – a most “foolish” sight indeed. But the Lord promises that this is the antidote for your death – that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

All that the Lord commanded them on Sinai – all this remembering, humbling, testing and disciplining – all so that they could live. But live how? By faith – that is – knowing “that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”

Every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord gives life. His word spoken on Mt. Sinai were not just words to help them get along with one another – or tips to surviving the wilderness – or how to possess the land that He had promised to their forefathers for He has something even greater in mind.

The Lord opens His mouth today and gives you a greater food – greater clothing – greater protection – greater guidance – greater healing – and a greater land. The land of Canaan, with its milk and honey – is only a shadow of the greater land that is Jesus Christ – where He settles you, to live in His kingdom which has no end.

We get a glimpse of this in the Lord's healing of the Ten Lepers. Their physical healing is the visible manifestation of the greater healing – the forgiveness of all their sin. And just as the one leper realized the Giver of this healing and returned to give thanks – so also there is a greater thanksgiving for us.

As we gather with family and friends around tables overflowing with food, in a warm house protected from the bitter elements – we are reminded that we have so much to give thanks for but there is even more.

We are gathered here as God's family, brothers and sisters in Christ – gathered to His Table to be fed with His holy food, the very body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord. We usually speak of this holy meal as the Lord's Supper – but it is also known as "the Eucharist" (which means, "to give thanks"). It is the Greater Thanksgiving.

Here too we live, not by bread alone – but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. The Lord opens His mouth to give you life – "This [bread] is my Body ... this cup [of wine] is my Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

Oh, what bounty the Lord gives to you this day. Not merely bread and wine – but forgiveness flowing from His crucified side and flooding you – supplying your every need – giving you life, life without end.

For all His gifts – Let us bless the Lord – Thanks be to God! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.