

Matthew 6 Dressing your Soul

Image is everything! This was the catch phrase that Cannon cameras used through their Tennis star Andre Agassi during the late 80's and 90's. It is the job of corporate America to convince us what we absolutely have to have if we are to feel good about ourselves, if we expect to keep up with the Joneses, or in our case, with the Pappas.' Drive the expensive car to impress. Live in the large spacious house to feel like we are in the lap of luxury. We wear the latest fashions and accessorize with the hottest brands of shoes and bags. And for what, so we can feel good about ourselves; so people can talk about us, or perhaps **not** talk about us. Guess what, they're going to talk about you no matter what you wear, drive or live. We become so anxious about so many insignificant things, and as a result we often forget what is most important—our souls

God knew right from the beginning that we would struggle with the things of this world. Christ saw for Himself, firsthand, how some become prisoners to their wealth, instead of using their wealth to free others from poverty and bondage. Perhaps this is the reason why He preached the teachings that we read in today's Gospel. The reading comes from His most famous collection of teachings, entitled, The Sermon on the Mount. These teachings address some of the most problematic issues that humanity encounters. Throughout His ministry, Christ used many examples found in nature to address the human condition.

He begins by reminding us that the eye is the lamp of the body. If the eye is good, you will see well, if the eye is bad, it will be difficult to see where you are going, and you will eventually be in danger of getting hurt. Think about all of the things we bump in to when we wake up in the middle of the night, half asleep waking in the dark. If our focus is not

on Christ and His teachings, if we allow our eyes to stray and gaze upon things that we should not we will eventually feel some spiritual pain.

Then Christ states that you cannot be a double agent for too long. You cannot serve both God and mammon. Doing that simply increases our level of hypocrisy—He reminds us elsewhere in the Sermon on the Mount that we should not be tossed to and fro by different doctrines, and that our yes should be yes and our no, no.

Finally Christ speaks about anxiety. There is a lot of justifiable anxiety in the world.

There are many people who live in war-torn areas and countries, others have tremendous epidemics that they are dealing with, still others have no idea where their next meal is coming from. Many are homeless, and others sick with no opportunity for treatment. And yet, when Christ speaks of anxiety, in the Sermon on the Mount, He mentions none of the that. Why, because these are real anxieties, which cause pain and suffering in the world. Instead, He warns those misguided believers that they should not be anxious about the type of food or drink they will consume, or the outfit that they will wear. He reminds them that some of the most beautiful things in this world—things from the natural world are created without humanity's hand and without anxiety—the lilies of the field, even the Grand Canyon—all natural wonders created by God—we could not do it any better—even with all the talent and technology we have. We could not even stop the rain at the US Open last week.

So if God creates something that beautiful which is part of the natural creation, how much more does He do for us who are the crown of His creation made in His Image and

Likeness. And as he says this He ends the sentence, “O thee of little faith.” There lies the cause of all our problems—our little and weak faith.

If we have the appropriate faith, not only do we not worry about the trivial matters of the world like what to wear and eat, but even the more severe issues, like our health, are trusted in the hands of our good and loving God. Christ ends by reminding us that our Heavenly Father knows what we need and that we should not be anxious. Instead, we should “seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and his righteousness, and all of these things shall be yours as well.”

There are some Evangelical preachers who claim that if you give to their Church you are guaranteed to have blessings in this world in return. We know that the real blessings that we desire, are the ones that await us in the kingdom of Heaven. And yet, it has been my experience, that when I go out of my way to help someone in need, or give till it hurts, somehow, somehow, I receive other blessings. I do not do this so that I can receive the blessing, but what a wonderful fringe benefit. This is what Christ meant when He said that if we seek the kingdom first, if we focus on our spiritual lives, everything else in our lives will somehow fall in place beautifully.

As for Andre Agassi, it wasn't until he took his hat off, shaved his head, and dropped the Cannon sponsorship and really focused on tennis, that he actually started winning major championship. Image is nothing—God is everything. Amen