

2<sup>nd</sup> before Lent 2014

## **St. Marylebone 11 am**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The Most Reverend Richard Chevenix Trench was one of the most distinguished clergymen of the 19th century.

A noted philologist and prolific poet, Trench, in his day, was often compared to Wordsworth, Tennyson and Keble and, in 1856, he became Dean of Westminster being preferred eight years later to become Archbishop of Dublin.

But for all his learning, Trench was a great worrier and he had a morbid fear of being paralyzed by a stroke.

One evening, at a party, the lady seated next to him at dinner, heard the archbishop muttering mournfully to himself, "Oh dear! It's happened at last ... total insensibility of the right lower limb."

"Your Grace," said the lady, "it may comfort you to learn that it is my leg that you are pinching!"

The British are, officially, the most anxious people in the world, or so a recent published report by the *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* seems to suggest.<sup>1</sup>

We are twice as likely to worry about things as our German neighbours, our closest rivals in the anxiety stakes as it happens, and almost 20 times more anxious than the European average!

So, today's Gospel reading might prove something of a real challenge to many of us – to say the least!

Jesus words this morning, come to us from the Sermon on the Mount and, as was his wont, Jesus asks his listeners a series of questions:

Is not life more than food and the body more than clothes?

Can any one of you, by worrying, add a single hour to your life or 42 cm to your height?

Why do you worry?

Jesus asks his hearers, are they living in the freedom of faith, or, are they limited, restricted, constrained by constant fretting and anxiety?

Well, if OECD survey I quoted is correct, it is just as well that Jesus asked his questions on a hillside in Galilee rather than in Regent's Park or indeed anywhere else in the UK!

But how can we – how can anyone - be like the lilies of the field or the birds of the air?

Do we just quickly read on and dismiss this part of the Sermon of the Mount, as being more relevant for 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine than for 21<sup>st</sup> century central London?

Or is there, just perhaps, still something really important for us to hear in Jesus message?

Jesus' words might well have been spoken at a particular time and in particular place, but his words are, whether or not we find them comfortable, addressed to us.

We are the men and the women who must stop and take stock; we are the men and women who are being told to stop being anxious, to stop worrying and

fretting about the minutiae of daily life; to be like “the lilies of the field and the birds of the air”.

We are the ones who need the constant reassurance, maybe even more than those who gathered on the hillsides of Galilee to listen to Jesus, that, as God’s precious children, as the subjects of God’s Kingdom, we have nothing to worry about.

If the God who looks after the birds and the flowers, which are, in and of themselves, worthless, valueless, ephemeral, how could God, in whose image and likeness we are made, not make sure that we have everything we could ever really need?

So, stop worrying, Jesus tells the Church, the Church in every age and in every place – even here in W1: by worrying, by being anxious you can’t add as much as a single hour to your life or 42 cm to your height.

In the immortal words of Michael Winner, Jesus message might be summed up as “Calm down dear!” your heavenly Father knows what you need.

Stop worrying, stop being anxious, live life in the moment that is now! The moment that is ever God's 'Yes!'

Stop straining agonisingly and fretfully towards an unknown future!

Stop looking wistfully and painfully back to the past!

All of these things can achieve nothing, except high blood pressure or an ulcer.

Jesus invites us, no, Jesus commands all who stop to listen to him, to live for now, to learn to live in the moment; and to do so by God's grace and, instead of worrying and being anxious, being thankful!

How hard it is for us, for me anyway, even to hear this; and how much harder to really believe what Jesus is saying and promising; to take to heart and to put into the practice of our daily lives!

But if we do stop to listen, if we don't turn over the page from this portion of the Sermon and the Mount; if we do put what Jesus says into practice, not only will we find that God does indeed look after us, but that we shall be living the Kingdom, the very Kingdom in

which God is indeed King, and that the rest of what God promises will follow, not just for us, but for all people, even the anxious British and the worrying Germans!

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> OECD Report <http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/2014/02/study-finds-british-workers-among-the-most-stressed-in-the-world/>