

Jesus says, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious...” As my dear, patient wife can tell you, one of the things that causes me to be anxious – though I shouldn’t be – is planning a road trip. When we first started to consider our recent trip out to Kansas, one of the first things I did was plug the destination into the maps app on my phone. And in no time at all, it gave me a route from Rawlins to Paola. No worries, right?

But then I wondered, was there any way to go around Kansas City, because I hate driving through big cities. And there was, but the route had us take the Kansas Turnpike – a toll road – and would we need exact change, and how much change? Would there be less construction on I-70 versus I-80, but then did Kansas have slower speed limits than Nebraska? And what about places to stop along the way? Worry, worry, worry.

But through Whitney’s patient encouragement, we took the original route on the way out there, and you know what? By God’s grace, everything worked out just fine. We made it to our destination, were blessed with lots of time catching up with our friends, and most of all got to witness the Lord Jesus call another little child to Him, the Holy Spirit working through water and the Word to make little Rebekah another cherished daughter of our Father in heaven. She, our family, all people, are in the hands of God, who brings us along to our perfect destination. Therefore, do not be anxious!

As we consider the journey through life, we need to know first off what is our intended destination. Jesus gives that to us in our Gospel text: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” The Kingdom of God – that is our destination. That is where we are to be bound for.

Now in one sense, all who believe and are baptized are already in the Kingdom of God, for the Kingdom of God includes anywhere that God reigns, including in the hearts of His people. This is what St. Paul refers to in the letter to the Colossians, where he says, “He [God the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

When our new little goddaughter was baptized, God miraculously worked to bring her into His kingdom. Whenever God the Holy Spirit comes through the Word and makes His home in the heart of someone and grants them faith, there is the Kingdom of God.

Yet in another sense, the Kingdom of God is still coming. By this I mean the fullness of the Kingdom, the day when God will do away with all evil forever, remake His people in perfection and holiness, and dwell openly among them in the New Creation.

This is what you, I, and all people are created for in the first place. God makes each and every person out of love, and He desires each and every person to live with Him forever. He says this beautifully through His prophet Jeremiah, “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

To St. John, the Lord Jesus revealed the wonderful sight of the innumerable white-robed host, gathered from every tribe and people and language and brought to the throne of the Lamb, who shelters them with His presence. Every tear is wiped away, every wrong made right, every sadness turned to

joy, every worry erased with perfect peace. That is the fullness of the Kingdom, and once that comes, it will never end. Never.

How do we reach this destination? Again, our Lord has already brought us onto the path to it, which is itself a part of the Kingdom.

He is the One who snatched us away from the devil's grasp and placed us on the road. He is the One who has opened our eyes to see the path, and has given His Word as lamp to our feet and a light to our path. He is the One who has restored our lame legs, that we might walk in His truth. He is the One who has put a new heart within us, one that actually desires to follow after Him and to seek His Kingdom. He is the One who washes away the filth of our sin and clothes us in the robes of His righteousness, that we might be allowed into His eternal wedding feast. All of this is His doing and His alone. We are saved by His grace alone, apart from any works that we do.

The blessings of the Lord as He leads us to His Kingdom aren't limited to only the spiritual, either. As Jesus points out in our Gospel lesson, your heavenly Father knows that you need food and drink and clothing.

Remember, He's the One who created your body, who knit you together in your mother's womb. He's the One who created this entire universe and designed how it is to function. He made the birds of the heavens on the fifth day of creation, and He continues to feed them, despite the fact that they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns.

He knows your needs – all of them – better than you do. And He will satisfy them. Christ gave us to pray to Our Father to give us our daily bread, and because He is a loving God, not a wicked one, He will give us the things that He has commanded us to pray for.

In fact, He very often goes far beyond that, as even nature shows us. The grass of the field, a seemingly insignificant part of creation, God has chosen to adorn with such beauty in the various flowers that He places upon it that even Solomon in all His splendor – the material high point of the Davidic kingdom – pales in comparison.

Jesus directs us to this display of beauty and reminds us, "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" Our Lord knows all the things needed to bring us through this life to the life to come, and He will not fail to provide them.

This truth gives us confidence and comfort, even in those times of hardship and suffering. Our God is the God who stretched out the heavens and who upholds the earth. His power is limitless. And our God is the God who offered up His very life for us, suffering the punishment for our sins, so that we might be redeemed. His love is absolute.

He knows the best path in which to lead us to our heavenly destination, the way that will bring us to paradise. Sometimes, that path will involve suffering. As He tells us in His Word, "In the world, you will have tribulation." Our sins bring all sorts of ill effects upon us, pain in our bodies, sorrow in our minds, strife in our relationships.

And our Lord knows that sometimes, the best – the only – way to drive us away from sin is through punishment and discipline. But His chastening rod is not that of an enemy seeking to destroy, rather that of a father disciplining a son whom he loves.

Other times, we will suffer for being faithful witnesses to a sinful world. Through the Spirit dwelling in us, the light of God shines into the world, and the world hates that light, for the light exposes the wickedness of darkness. Yet as much as this world and its prince the devil would want to put out the light, our mighty Lord defends us from all danger, never permitting us to suffer anything that He will not give us the strength to be able to bear.

All things, good and ill, are in the hands of God, and those hands bear the scars of His love for us. This truth is wonderfully put in our sermon hymn, one I would highly recommend to you as a prayer and devotion. It is we sing and confess, “What God ordains is always good: He never will deceive me; He leads me in His righteous way, and never will He leave me. I take content what He has sent; His hand that sends me sadness will turn my tears to gladness.”

Because our Lord is in control of all things, and because He is guiding all things for the good of His people, we need not be anxious. As Jesus says, “Which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” Anxiety does no good, and is in fact a tool of the devil, because it seeks to drive a wedge between us and God by undermining our trust in Him.

Anxiety is born out of the idea that maybe God isn’t all powerful and can’t help us, or maybe He doesn’t fully understand what’s going on, or maybe He doesn’t actually love us and want what is best for us.

In anxiety, we start to think that maybe the burden is on us to make it to our destination, that maybe the map He has given to us in His Scriptures is wrong, that it has errors or is out of date or would cause us to miss things that are truly good for us. We second guess His holy Word, especially when it seems that many others are walking a different path, sort of like questioning your GPS when you see all the traffic taking a different route or exit.

We start asking “What shall we eat?” and “What shall we drink?” and “What shall we wear?”, letting these worries distract us from the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Our eyes, and our hearts, are tempted to serve both God and money, contrary to Christ’s command. And all this does is increase our anxiety.

It is during those times, and even before such times come, that we need to look again to the words of our Lord. Does God not know our troubles? Hear Him remind His disciples, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.”

Could God not be strong enough to give the help I need? Read and hear the Lord remind Job, and all of us, that He is the One who laid the foundation of the earth, who determined the measurements of the universe, who shut in the sea, who commands the morning, who has arranged the stars in their places.

Does God love me? “For God so loved the world” – that includes you – “that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” God knows

what you need, is able to provide what you need, and in love desires to give you what you need. Therefore, do not be anxious.

“What God ordains is always good: This truth remains unshaken. Though sorrow, need, or death be mine, I shall not be forsaken. I fear no harm, for with His arm He shall embrace and shield me; so to my God I yield me.”

In the name of Jesus, amen.