

Tuesday, May 5, 2020

It's just a shirt

Pastor Hank French

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? (Matthew 6:25).

After 16 years in Japan, learning a new and strange culture along with a new and difficult language, I got used to making a fool out of myself and so I am not ashamed to tell you the following story.

Some 48 years ago, when I was in my first year in the seminary, I learned, through a rather embarrassing experience, to “not worry about... [my] body and what [I] will wear.”

First year seminary students often have delusions of holiness and go around trying to look and act “spiritual.” Guilty as charged. One day I was walking through the men’s department in Dayton’s when I saw a pure white collarless shirt on a mannequin. It looked like the kind of shirt an Indian holy man might wear. I had to have that shirt, even though it was more expensive than a seminary student should spend on a shirt. It projected the image I foolishly wanted to project.

I bought it and wore it to school the next day and the next day. My friends were impressed and a few of them wanted to know where I bought it. It seemed like I had started a fashion trend for those aspiring to be spiritual—or who at least wanted to project the image of a spiritual person, as if a shirt could do that!

Well, to make a long story short, after wearing that shirt for a few days, it needed laundering and, not knowing much about doing the laundry, I threw this 100% cotton shirt in with the rest of the laundry, set the machine to hot water, set the dryer to high heat, and you can imagine what happened. That shirt shrank down to the point where it would not have fit a 10-year old!

Instead of rightly feeling foolish, I was deeply disappointed and furious. I went back to Dayton’s—they were sold out. I went to Southdale—no shirt. I went to Rosedale—no shirt. I went to every store I could think of—no shirt, and this was way before Amazon. I was ridiculously obsessive.

And after an obsessive week or so, while walking through the aisles of some clothing store, I stopped and suddenly asked myself, “What are you doing??? It’s just a shirt!” It was over. I didn’t need that silly shirt anymore. I had an answer to Jesus’ question: “*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*” Yes! Life is so much more than the material things we obsess over.

At the end of the text that today's verse came from, Jesus says: "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ... "But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness...." That's where spirituality resides—not in a shirt!

Prayer: Holy God, help me to strive for your kingdom and your righteousness so my life might make more sense than a meaningless shirt. Amen.