

3rd Sunday of Lent – March 6/7, 2021 – Year of St. Joseph – “I Have a Dream” – Daniel, a Dreamer and Hero for an Oppressed and Persecuted People

Classes were done for the day at the major seminary of St. John's in Boston where I was in Third Theology studying for the priesthood for the Diocese of Worcester. Word began to spread through the hallways that white smoke had been seen pouring from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel where the Cardinal electors had been locked in conclave to elect a new Pope for the Roman Catholic Church. After three days, they finally made their choice. I remember a bunch of us gathered around a tiny black and white portable TV in the room of my classmate, Eddie Chalmers. We all speculated who the Princes of the Church would choose; which of the Italian Cardinal Papabile would sit on the throne of Peter. We watched as the crowds grew in St. Peter's Square waiting to hear the announcement from the balcony of the basilica as to who had been chosen. I'll never forget as the glass doors opened and the Dean of the College of Cardinals stepped forward and announced that the one chosen was Karol Jozef Cardinal Wojtyla of Poland ... not an Italian after all ... a relatively young, vibrant, athletic, philosophical, modern bishop from behind the Iron Curtain.

As darkness fell on St. Peter's Square, the crowds grew and grew until, at last, the new Pope emerged on the balcony clothed in white and red robes. I can't remember all he said to us that night, but I do remember one thing he said, something he would say many times over the next 27

years of his papacy. He said to the Church, to the world, to us watching on TV, he said, "Be Not Afraid!"

I heard those words, spoken to a world that every day made people more and more afraid, as carrying a message from the Vicar of Christ on the earth to God's People that we should not fear, Christ has conquered the world, conquered fear. I thought in that wonderful moment of the Church song that was just coming to be sung in our worship and, especially, at our funerals, "Be Not Afraid".

"If you pass through raging waters, in the sea, you shall not drown ..." - in the days of the Great Flood, Noah was unafraid as God brought the ark to rest on the heights of Mt. Ararat; in the days of the Exodus, Moses was not afraid as God parted the waters of the Red Sea and led His people dry shod through those roiling waters to the Promised Land. On the Sea of Galilee, the Apostles were terrified as the storm raged all about them and the waves swamped their little boat, but Jesus was not afraid as He commanded the wind to still, the sea to calm, and the storm begone. And what about us, what about us as the waters of pandemic and illness, violence and division, divorce and loss, racism and hatred rise all around us? Who wouldn't be afraid??!

"If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed ..." - Daniel relates the story of the three young men who would not eat meat that had been offered to idols, not betray their faith in the One God, Yahweh, even though the penalty for disobeying the edict of the pagan king was death, death by fire in a fiery furnace. The three young Jewish men walked into those white-hot flames rather than betray their God, but instead of perishing in the inferno, the guards and the king saw three men walking about in the flames and they were joined by

a fourth that "looked like a Son of Man" ... those condemned were not left alone to face their trial by fire.

St. Joseph, in his dreams, was told to "have no fear about taking Mary as your wife;" to have no fear about a cave, a manger for his family when there was no room for them in the inn; to have no fear about a murderous ancient king who would kill the newborn King of the Jews ... "take the Child and His Mother and go to Egypt where you will be safe."

Even Jesus prayed in the midst of His fear and pain, "Father, take this cup from me if it be Thy will," as He sweat beads of blood; and from the agony of the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou abandoned me?" as He breathed His last, seemingly alone and abandoned.

There are many dangers and snares, many heartbreaks and trials in this world of ours, this vale of tears. But a man spoke a word of prophecy to a disheartened, frightened people ... Daniel said, "Be Not Afraid"; and the flames only made their faith the stronger. But a God spoke in the night dreams of a hesitant husband and foster father to a King, "Be Not Afraid"; and he protected his Holy Family with his life, all his life long. But a man robed in white spoke from the balcony of a church to a world filled with frightened hearts, "Be Not Afraid"; and though bloodied by an assassin's bullet, burned by the criticisms of his enemies, bowed by the illness that robbed him of his fit body and powerful tongue, with his last breath he spoke "Be Not Afraid" ; "Totus Tuus" ... I am always and ever in Your hands.

I leave you with a vision, a dream, to calm your fears, O little flock:

"One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For

each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you the most you would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

"Be Not Afraid ... I go before you always; come, follow me, and I will give you rest."