

THE ONLY THING WE HAVE TO FEAR....

In the midst of all the frantic efforts to cancel history some may find unpalatable, it might be helpful to read President Franklin Roosevelt's first inaugural address from 1933. At the height of the Great Depression, and in the course of offering a long list of possible remedies to the tough times so many were experiencing, he also spent a great deal of time extolling all the blessings our nation needed to recognize. And that now-famous line "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" encapsulated his vision for America and his hope for the future. Those words tickled my memory recently as President Trump urged Americans to not allow fear of a virus to dominate our lives. Whatever one may think of the president, I began to wonder how Americans reacted to FDR's reflection on fear nearly ninety years ago. Did they ridicule him, or were they reminded of all the reasons they had to hope for a better day, a day that did indeed eventually arrive, albeit with much pain and sacrifice?

St. Paul had to deal with fear as he wrote his first letter to the Church in Thessaloniki which will be proclaimed on and off for the next several weeks, beginning today. The Thessalonians were certain that the end of the world was just around the corner, and Paul himself might even have been inclined to think the same. Persecutions were just beginning and various divisions were cropping up in the newly founded communities of believers, with the reluctance of Jewish converts to accept Gentiles into the churches becoming one of the most contentious issues. So the Thessalonians were expecting Jesus to return at any moment to fix the mess they felt they were in, and Paul had to remind them that all they needed to do was to simply live good, faithful lives here and now rather than live in fear of what might or might not happen tomorrow.

And if we were still in the Year of St. Luke, we would be hearing "do not be afraid" repeated over and over again in his Gospel – and which we do hear every year as God's angels announce Good News to Mary, to Joseph, and to the shepherds on the hillside in those first Lukan chapters. I doubt that either president had scripture in mind when they urged us to not live in fear, but that attitude is indeed at the center of our faith. It doesn't mean that we abandon reasonable caution, take unnecessary chances or live reckless lives – like too many drivers do these days with tailgating, lane hopping and driving twenty miles over the limit! Not living in fear quite simply means living with faith in the essential goodness of life, with an appreciation of the blessings we enjoy both as Americans and as children of God, and with an abiding trust in a loving Creator who isn't plotting an end to this essentially wonderful world. Two presidents and St. Luke got it right; why can't we?

Fr. Bob