

12th Sunday in Ord. Time -- June 20-21, 2020

This weekend we return to Ordinary Time in the Church's liturgical year. Having celebrated the major seasons and feasts of our faith, we now turn to work on the daily living of our faith and growth in our faith. Today's readings fit right in with this return to ordinary time.

A few weeks ago on the feast of the Ascension Jesus gave us the great commission to go out to make disciples of all nations. After having given his disciples basic instructions on what to take on their missions and where to go and what to do, today in the Gospel Jesus speaks to the disciples and to us about some of the difficulties and obstacles we likely encounter and in the first reading we heard Jeremiah's reflections and response to the personal attacks against him in mission as a prophet of the Lord.

The central message and assurance that Jesus repeats to us in today's Gospel is that we not be afraid no matter what opposition we encounter. Fittingly for this Father's Day weekend, he assures us that our heavenly Father is fully aware of all that we may be going through and will protect us and lead us through all obstacles.

Before we go further into the specific encouragements Jesus has for us in dealing with the natural fears we have in carrying out his missions for us, it would be good to reflect a little on fear in general and how much fears are used to manipulate us in everyday life.

Fear is easy. Courage is tougher to acquire. The culture around us benefits from feeding us fear so there is always plenty to go around. The fashion industry constantly tells us that we are not wearing the right clothes. Sellers of the latest technology inform us that we're missing out or already far behind the devices others are using. Social media assures us that we are not having us the fun others are having. We need to make more money, take more cruises, watch more shows, eat and drink more. And

An elderly woman named Maude had a window seat on a big 747 jetliner that had just taken off for Rome from New York. She had been saving for years to fulfill her dream to visit the Eternal City. But it was her first flight, and she was terrified. Even the stately presence of four bishops seated behind her didn't help. With fear and trembling she finally opened her eyes and peered out the window, just in time to see one of the plane's four engines break loose from the wing and disappear into the clouds. "We're going to die!" she cried out. "We're going to die!" The stewardess consulted with the pilot who announced to the passengers that everything was under control that they could fly back to New York and land safely with three engines. But Maude continued to cry out, "We're going to die!" The stewardess went to her and said, "Don't worry, my dear, God is with us. We have only three engines, but look, we have four bishops to pray for us." To which Maude replied, "I'd rather have four engines and three bishops!" In today's Gospel Jesus gives us three reasons why we should not be afraid and why we should have the courage of our Christian convictions.

that is just for starters. Deeper messaging urges us to seek more protection from the world – buy more guns, build more defenses, eliminate competitors, shut out people who are different – not to trust our Pope, bishop or priests. Fear tells us that there is not enough of the good stuff for everybody so we have to choose sides, identify enemies, stockpile our fair share. The way fear can be used is limitless. That is why Jesus, who seeks our liberation, reminds us often – Don't be afraid. Be faithful, not fearful.

It would be good to ask ourselves what are our main fears, and how do we counter them? It is good to know hidden things in us that influence what we say and do.

The Lord has commanded us 365 times in the Scriptures – “Do not fear.” By this command, the Lord means that we should not fear any human being, human circumstance, or even the devil. Among other things, we should not fear death, dying, pain, persecution, rejection, loneliness, poverty, old age, having a large family, evangelizing, going to Confession, becoming a priest, religious or missionary, tithing and giving alms, downsizing our lifestyles, etc.

The Lord commands us so frequently not to fear because we are so frequently tempted to let ourselves be manipulated by fear. And God's plan for our lives, practically speaking, probably depends on whether we have consistently accepted God's grace to overcome fear. Otherwise, we are life-long slaves of the devil through fear of death and all similar concerns.

Inviting us not to fear, Jesus asks the disciples and us to have what is the opposite of fear, that is, the trust that frees us from fear – the trust that our life is in the hands of God.

A certain fear of death is right to preserve life and govern our actions in a good sense. However, fear, which is correct to some extent, cannot be the beginning of all actions. The engine of life must be

trust or, better, the love that puts its trust in those who love us.

Faith tells us that our life is guarded by the love of God, who is our Father. Christ reminds us that if God cares even for sparrows and little things like the hairs of our head, he certainly takes care of us every day. He is never absent. In Jesus, he is Emmanuel, God with us in every moment of our life. He is always present, is moved by our needs and cries with us, shares our pain, wipes our tears and bends over each one of us.

Being a follower of Christ does not entitle us to comfort, luxury, and safety; in fact, sometimes it will lead us in the opposite direction. Jesus warns the twelve apostles before he sends them out on mission that they will very likely be met with rejection, even stating – “you will be hated by all because of my name.” Yet even if they face human hatred, they are to fear no one and nothing, for their souls are protected by the God of everlasting life.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives us three reasons not to fear. **First**, “Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.” – That is – God will expose the things of darkness – the hidden evil plans of our opponents will be brought out into the light for all to see. **Second**, the power of our opponents is limited. They may kill the body and threaten bodily harm or death, but they cannot kill the soul. The power is with God. This past week I knelt and prayed in the church at Badger as the storm and wind was raging. It was frightening, but at the same time the word of God came to me that the fierce wind, and violent lightning and thunder that were so frightening were also a reflection of the power of God and his almighty power over all things. In the second reading today, St. Paul speaks of how much greater are the grace and mercy of God than all the transgressions of mankind from Adam and on that brought sin and death into the world.

The heart of the message in today’s Gospel is that if we understand how Christ is with us and in us, then our fear will be overcome by the power of love. It

was Jesus' love –greater than all the overwhelming rejection, hatred, fallenness of the world, and threat of suffering and death – that enabled him to come to enter into and take on all its sins and transform them and redeem them. If Christ is in us, and we accept his presence in us then that same compassion and love that was in him will carry us forth like him to bring healing to the world regardless of the threat of suffering and death.

Let us pray that like Jeremiah in the first reading, we may move from fear and paralysis to entrust ourselves to the grace and power of God. May we in love collaborate with the redemptive work of God in our world. May the Holy Spirit testify in our heart that we are truly the children of God and that it is reasonable to accept all events of our life that come to us in the hand of God.