

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the fate of the servant of God. They show that it is impossible to work for the Lord without meeting difficulties. They invite us to persevere in time of trouble, knowing well that the Lord sustains us and will never let us down.

The first reading speaks of the persecution of the prophet Jeremiah. It shows that his enemies have been deliberately plotting against him in order to attempt to destroy his life. It also shows that in spite of their plot, the prophet put his trust in the Lord to save him. Finally, the text shows that as the prophet hoped in the Lord, he rescued him.

What is behind this text is the idea that the wicked people plan continually, for no reason, bad acts against the just. Another idea is that God does not abandon his servant to the meanness of his enemies. The last idea is the invitation to praise God anytime because he takes care of us.

This text allows us to understand today's Gospel in which Jesus calls the apostles to trust him and not fear their enemies. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus' statement that his disciples should not live in fear or be afraid of those who can kill the body and not the soul. Then, it speaks of Jesus' invitation to the apostles that they trust him because their fate is in the hands of God who takes care of them. The Gospel ends up with Jesus' statement that anyone who stays loyal to him, he will be loyal to him, too; but if anyone denies him, he will deny him, too, before his Father.

What do we learn from today's Gospel? Today I want to talk about our assurance for the future. What do I want to say by that? Let me explain. I believe that as human beings we have different feelings or emotions according to the situations we face. If we face a danger, or a threat or something that can cause us pain, the feeling that will come spontaneously out of us is fear.

In itself fear is not always negative. It is also positive in the sense that if we did not fear at all, we would not protect ourselves from legitimate threats or dangers. That is why when there is a threat to our life or a risk of losing our life there will be fear arising in us.

It is here that today's Gospel speaks to us. In fact, the apostles have been very closely associated to the ministry and the life of Jesus. By his mission, Jesus knew that his fate would not be different from that of the prophets who came before him, were persecuted and eventually killed. But, as the apostles were associated with him, their fate would not be different, and they would be persecuted and killed too.

That danger was permanent before them. And as human beings they were certainly fearing for their physical integrity. But, against this danger, Jesus wants the apostles to not be afraid. He even insists by using the word "Do not be afraid" three times.

Why is he doing so? The point is that he wants to reassure them so that they keep their calm and continue their job of spreading the Good news of the Kingdom. That is why he says, "what I say in darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops". In other words, the possibility of losing their life should not become an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel

Jesus gives us the same recommendation with regard to his word we have to proclaim in time and out of time, each according to his vocation. In spite of many obstacles we find in our culture today, we need to be courageous and employ ourselves to bring the word of Jesus to others.

The question that comes up is this: why should the apostles not be afraid? First of all, for Jesus, indeed, those who can kill the body do not have the power to kill the soul. God alone has the power to kill the body and the soul. Therefore, if there is someone to be legitimately feared, that one is God.

But I wonder if we truly fear God? Experience has shown that many times we fear what people can say about us or are thinking of us than what God thinks of us. Are we not sometimes afraid that people around us may be disappointed if we do not respond with satisfaction to their expectation? But, how often do we care for what God expects from us? Are we even afraid of being separated from God forever because of our sins?

Second, the apostles should not fear because their life is in the hands of God. In other words, the disciple is protected by God who takes care of him. If God cares for the sparrows, surely he cares for his beloved ones. Jesus teaches us here a complete trust in his Father. There is nothing, even the worst case that can happen to us without God's knowledge. In all that happens to us, God is with us, surrounding us with his love and mercy. Our life is into his hands.

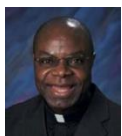
It does not mean, however, that our enemies cannot harm us. It means only that even in such a situation, we are not forgotten by God. That is why, in persecution, we need courage, perseverance and fidelity. It is only by doing so that Jesus can recognize us before his heavenly Father and reward us.

If you understand well, the whole problem here is about God's providence upon us. A divine providence well understood is that which recognizes that God knows everything about us. He takes care of us more than he does with the plants and the birds. We are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows.

To believe in providence, however, does not mean that we have to drive drunk under the pretext that God will protect us, or to run some risks by our bad behaviors with the hope that God will be at our side. To believe in God's providence in our life is also to accept our own responsibilities with regard to what we do.

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to understand that our future is in his hands. Let us ask him the courage of perseverance, especially when we have hard times. God bless you all!

Jeremiah 20: 10-13; Romans 5: 12-15; Matthew 10: 25-33



Homily Date: June 25, 2017
© 2017 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20170625homily.pdf