

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

In the Gospel of today Jesus talking to his apostles, says three times: Do not be afraid. First time: "Fear no one"; second time: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; third time: "Do not be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows". Those three times show Jesus' insistence that his apostles should not be afraid of anything happening to them.

This insistence of Jesus pushes me to talk to you about our assurance for the future. What do I want to say by that? Let me explain. 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 will be 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. And that is all right. The health crisis in which we are with the Coronavirus gives us an idea of what fear can bring to people.

It is this point that the Gospel of today is really valuable and deeply speaking to us. Let us start with the situation of Jesus, then, that of the apostles. First of all, we know that Jesus was not accepted by all his fellow countrymen. By his mission and teaching, he knew that his fate would not be different from that of the prophets who came before him as they were persecuted and eventually killed. In truth, Jesus' confrontation with the Jewish authority led him eventually himself to death.

Second, we know that the apostles were closely associated with Jesus' mission and ministry. In that context, their fate would not be different from that of Jesus. As Jesus was persecuted and killed, they too would be persecuted and killed. The danger of losing their life anytime, like Jesus, was permanent before them. And the reading of the Bible shows that things, indeed, happened exactly as expected.

Thus, as human beings, the apostles were living in some fear about what could happen to them. They feared for their physical integrity and their life. It is against this danger that Jesus is talking about by inviting the apostles to not be afraid.

Why is Jesus doing so? The point Jesus wants to make is to reassure his disciples 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. That call of Jesus is relevant even today.

That is why 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 use all our talents and skills to bring the word of Jesus to others. Any danger we face in our life should not prevent us from proclaiming the Gospel of salvation.

The question that comes up is this: why should the apostles not be afraid? First of all, for Jesus, those who can kill the body do not have the power to kill the soul. God alone

has the power to kill both the body and the soul. Therefore, it is God that we should legitimately fear.

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? 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 disciples are protected by God who takes care of them. 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 in the worst case, which can happen to us without God's knowledge. In all that happens to us, God is with us, surrounding us with love and mercy. Our life is totally 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 to accept our own responsibilities with regard to what we do, to know that there things we can do in our power, but the outcome of all depends on him.

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: 26-33**



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