

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

When the Saint Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978, his first words to the crowd assembled in St Peter Square were “Don’t be afraid”. The Pope has all the reasons to do so because he was the first Pontiff to be elected outside Italy in more than seven hundred years of the history of the Church.

These words were destined to reassure the Catholics throughout the world that the Church will keep the right line and not deviate from the truth of our Lord Jesus. They were also destined to reassure the people of God that they should not be afraid of any storm that may buffet them, for they have their hope in Jesus Christ, who came to save the world from darkness. For St. John Paul II, nothing should take away our hope in the Lord. When we know that God is in control, and that he is love, our fears disappear.

Jesus uses similar words throughout this Gospel. Two times, our Lord says “do not be afraid” and one time “fear not”. The prospect of fear rises up when there is a danger or something that can threaten one’s physical integrity or cause death. Such a danger was always permanent before the apostles because of the hostile environment in which they were laboring and which eventually led to the death of our Lord on the cross.

For sure, our Lord knew well that his fate would not be different from that of the prophets who came before him. They were persecuted and eventually killed. The apostles being his closest associates would not have escaped the same fate. They too would be persecuted, mistreated and killed, like him.

In those circumstances, the threat of being killed was real. But, where there is fear, there is also the possibility of paralysis that could impact the work of the proclamation of the Gospel. It is in that context that Jesus invites the apostles not to be fearful.

For our Lord, the apostles should be courageous enough and carry out their mission with calm and without fear. The possibility of losing their lives should not become an obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel. Then, he can claim, “what I say in darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops”.

Why, then, to keep proclaiming the word of God in spite of the danger of losing one’s life? For our Lord those who have the power to kill the body have no control over the soul. The one truly worth being feared is God. Only he can destroy both body and soul in the Gehenna. He has an everlasting power to kill the body or to give it life anew.

The question I ask myself is to know if we truly fear God. Human experience has shown that many times we fear what people can say about us or think 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 sins?

The real reason our Lord gives for not fearing lies mostly in the providence of God for us. For our Lord, the whole of our life is in the hands of God. The disciple is protected by God who takes care of him. If God cares for the birds like sparrows, surely he can care for his beloved ones. Our Lord teaches us here a complete trust in his Father.

There is nothing, even in 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.

The belief in the providence does not mean 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 our Lord will 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 be complacent by being careless in things we do under the pretext of being protected by God. To drive drunk under the pretext of being protected by God is presumptuous and sinful. Keeping risky conducts and bad behaviors with a hope that God will be at our side is superstitious and not Christian. To believe in God's providence in our life is to accept first of all our responsibilities with regard to what we do.

The Gospel of this day ends with warning: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge him before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny him before my heavenly Father." Here lies the double loyalty of Christian life. Whoever is loyal to our Lord in this life, our Lord will be loyal to him in the life to come. Whoever is proud to acknowledge our Lord as his master, our Lord will be proud to acknowledge him as his servant. Whoever is ashamed of our Lord in this life, our Lord will be ashamed of him in the life to come.

The Church of today is built on the witness and the loyalty of those who held fast to their faith even in the presence of evident threats of death. Their example inspires us to trust indefinitely God in any circumstances of life and to show our loyalty to him. Let us trust our Lord Jesus, knowing well that his Father is in control of everything and our own lives are in his hands. God bless you!

**Jeremiah 20: 10-13; Romans 5: 12-15; Matthew 10: 26-33**



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