

Scripture Study

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A



Opening prayer

Jeremiah 20:10-13

(Ps 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35)

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

Overview of the Gospel:

- We rejoin Jesus in Matthew's Gospel this week during the first year of His public ministry. He has just commissioned the twelve (Matthew 10:1-4) and is instructing them as they are sent out.
- In verses 5-15, Jesus gives them very specific instructions concerning the scope and activity of this particular mission. They are to avoid gentile and Samaritan villages and preach only to the Jews (verses 5-6). They are to preach the same message and do the same works that Jesus himself has been doing (verses 7-8). They are not to be loaded down with heavy provisions for their journey, but instead rely upon the providence of God and the charity of those who will welcome them (verse 9-15).
- He also warns them of the persecutions that are bound to come as a result of their preaching, and how they are to respond to the opposition of those who will not hear them (verses 9-25).
- This brings us to this Sunday's Gospel reading where Jesus reminds his disciples that, even though they must suffer hardship and persecution in his name, they are to have no fear of human persecutors who can only harm the body, but cannot harm the soul (Wisdom 3: 1-9). The eternal reward for those who faithfully serve the Lord to the end far outweighs their earthly trials (Matthew 10:22; Romans 2:6-7).

Questions:

- In the second reading, what is the situation of the prophet Jeremiah? What is the Lord's response to his lament? What is response of Jeremiah's heart? How is this reflective of the mission of Jesus' disciples?
- In the second reading, how are we to understand the introduction of death into the world through Adam? What kind of death was this? Why are all men said to sin if only Adam did? (see CCC 400-404)
- In the Gospel reading, who is the "them" that the disciples are told not to be afraid of? Who would persecute them (verses 17-18, 21-22)? Why?
- In times of persecution, what could the disciples expect from God (verses 19-20, 22, 32, 39, 41-42)?
- If the disciples are not to fear "those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul", whom *should* they fear, and why?
- What kind of fears do you have in standing up for the Lord and proclaiming the Gospel? Physical danger? Ridicule? Shunning? What does the Lord say about such fears? How can you better place your trust in him to see you through persecution?
- What reward and penalty does the Lord promise for those who are faithful and not faithful? How seriously do you take these promises? What are the eternal ramifications for each one?

Catechism of the Catholic Church: §§ 305, 1034, 1816, 2145

Closing prayer

Remember to read and meditate on the daily Mass readings!

We should love and feel compassion for those who oppose us, since they harm themselves and do us good, and adorn us with crowns of everlasting glory. --St. Anthony Zaccaria

"Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell"

Gospel: **Matthew 10:26-33**

Jesus said to the Twelve: "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Meditation: What does fear have to do with the kingdom of God? Fear is a powerful force. It can lead us to panic and flight or it can spur us to faith and action. The fear of God is the antidote to the fear of losing one's life. I sought the Lord, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears' fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no want! Come, O sons, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord. (Psalm 34:4,9,11)

What is godly fear? It is reverence for the One who made



us in love and who sustains us in mercy and kindness. The greatest injury or loss which we can experience is not physical but spiritual -- the loss of one's soul to the power of hell. A healthy fear of God leads to spiritual maturity, wisdom and right judgment and it frees us from the tyranny of sinful pride, cowardice -- especially in the face of evil, and spiritual deception. Do you trust in God's grace and mercy and submit to his word?

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus commands us three times to have no fear (Mt 10:26, 28, 31). The Lord in the Bible commands us 365 times to have no fear — once for each day of the year. One of St. Pope John Paul II's most frequent and emphatic words of prophecy was: "Do not fear."

When we give in to fear, we let ourselves be manipulated into choosing death rather than life (see Dt 30:19). Fear keeps us wandering in the desert rather than entering the promised land. By giving in to fear, we delay the fulfillment of God's promises and may even delay His final coming (see 2 Pt 3:12). Through fear, we

become spiritually contraceptive and abortifacient. We refuse the abundant life (see Jn 10:10).

We overcome fear by totally committing ourselves to the Lord (see Ps 27:1). We fight fear of people, circumstances, and life with the fear of the Lord. In the fear of the Lord, we are "never alarmed, never afraid" (Sir 34:14). When we decide to love the Lord completely — in every area of our lives — we cast out all ungodly fear (1 Jn 4:18). Fear of God and love of God displace other fears: "Do not fear."

When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God he met opposition and hostility. He tells his disciples that they must expect the same treatment if they are to live and to proclaim the reign of God. There is both a warning and a privilege in his statement. Just as Jesus had to carry his cross, so the disciples must carry their cross and not try to evade it. To suffer for the faith is to share in the work of Christ. As one hymn states: Lift high the Cross of Christ! Tread where his feet have trod. The Holy Spirit gives us power and grace to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Do you trust in God's grace to carry your cross for Jesus' sake?

"Lord, it is my joy and privilege to your disciple. Give me strength and courage to bear any hardship and suffering which may come my way in your service. May I witness to others the joy of the gospel."