

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020 (A): Do not Be Afraid!

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Parish,

Happy Father's Day to all the young and old fathers of CCST! May God nourish and strengthen the gift of fatherhood he bestowed upon you.

Do not be afraid! This is the overarching theme of the readings from the Sacred Scriptures this weekend.

We all experience fear, and we can't ignore its reality in our life. There are acute fears as well as there are chronic fears. Dangerous situations cause acute fears. One of the acute fears that we can recall was the false alerts we received on our cellphone on January 13, 2018. It was a threat of the ballistic missile attack to the Hawaiian Islands. Fear overwhelmed most of the people at that time and then disappeared as soon as the danger was over, leaving us only a bad memory.

On the other hand, chronic fears are dangerous. Different layers of experiences in life may cause them, and they live within the person, and they often interfere with the person's ability to function and relax. Of course, this needs careful medical attention and therapy and prayer.

However, fear is healthy and even helpful. It serves a protective purpose; it triggers instinctive "fight-or-flight" response, enables us to respond quickly to protect ourselves, and sometimes results in remarkable courage and strength. Fear can only become evil when it does not allow the person to live. It is paralyzing and damaging when it caused the person to shut down. It can also become an excuse for inaction. A person who is always anxious suffered two times over. Someone said that anxiety had become the illness of the century, and it is one of the leading causes for the multiplication of heart attacks.

Yes, we cannot ignore the reality of fear. Fear is real. It stands out from all other emotions, for it is the only one that holds us back. But our Liturgical readings this Sunday provided us remedy to fear. In our first reading, Prophet Jeremiah expressed a litany of his anxiety over the terror that surrounds him and helplessness over those who persecuted him. He acknowledged his fears, but he believed in God, and he hoped that someday he would be victorious over those who threaten to kill him, and God will save him according to his wisdom (cf. Jer. 20:10-13). In the same fashion, St. Paul is convinced that it is faith in Jesus who offered his life to save us from eternal death, the grace overflowed to many that give strength in any adversities (cf. Rom 5:13-15). Jesus is the strength that helps St. Paul persevere, and it is the same Jesus that will help us through whatever difficulties we may have in life.

Our Lord Jesus summed up all these by telling his disciples about their value before God the Father - that the Father knows each one of them. To emphasize his point, he said that even all the hairs of their head are counted. With this confidence, we heard him saying, "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" (Matt 10:28). The disciples should not fear any human agent or any form of worldly force that can only kill the body but not the soul. These forces may impose suffering and death on the body but have no power over the soul. Our Lord Jesus uses this distinction between body and soul to contrast the relative value of earthly life with the absolute good of eternal life in heaven (cf. CCC 363). It is on this belief of absolute good, our eternal life, that Jesus wants his disciples to hold on, and not to lose their soul. I believe it took a while for the disciples to master the courage of faith, but they did by God's grace. They were faithful to the end.

The remedy of fear is this, to trust God the Father, to believe in his providence, and his enduring love. Yes, fear is real, but faith is more real and stronger, for it releases the power of goodness that overcomes evil. St. Theresa of Avila profoundly said this in her poem, "let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things

are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices."

Jesus wants to free us from fears. He does this in two ways, one by taking away the fear from our hearts, and the other, by helping us live with anxiety in a new way, making it an occasion of grace for ourselves and others.

Let us offer our fears to Jesus. Let us renew our trust in him. When we receive the Holy Eucharist, the fullness of his humanity and divinity, let us remember what St. Paul said that Jesus has already defeated death and is victorious through his passion, death, and resurrection; and His grace is overflowing (cf. Rom 5:15). What we received has the strength to make us steadfast in the faith. This is what we believed!

God bless you.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor, CCST