

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time  
June 21, 2020

Jeremiah 12:10-13  
Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35  
Romans 5:12-15  
Matthew 10:26-33

The Lord is the strength of His people, a saving refuge for the one He has anointed. Save your people, Lord, and bless your heritage, and govern them forever.

Once again this morning's entrance antiphon sets the stage for the homily in that it directs our attention to the faithfulness of God to be near to His children during times of hardship, persecution, and even death itself.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Recorded in Psalm 27 this promise reassures the friend of Jesus that no matter what may come his or her way, whether it be adversity or prosperity, and sometimes the tests of prosperity can be much more difficult than the tests of adversity; no matter what may come, God is only a simple prayer away. Indeed, Scripture reassures us that the Most Holy Trinity will never leave us or forsake us.

As we turn to examine this morning's Gospel reading, we observe Jesus telling His disciples, "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be told." The idea to "Fear no one," is an interesting statement to say the least; but more to the point, Jesus said, "Do not fear those who have the ability to kill your mortal body. However, the one to fear is the one who has the ability to destroy both your physical body and your soul in the fires of hell." Indeed, the one to fear is the one who has authority over eternal destinies.

So lets stop here for a moment and ask the question, to whom was Jesus referring to when He alluded to fearing the one who has authority over your body and soul? Was He referring to His Father in Heaven or was He referring to Beelzebub or maybe He was referring to both?

First of all, we must note that fear is not a bad four letter word. No not at all, a healthy fear of poisonous snakes, crocodiles, and/or terrorist gunman is probably a very good thing. So more than likely, Jesus was here talking about having rational rather than irrational fears.

I think it more than likely that most of us fear death and that would probably be considered normal, but what Jesus was communicating to His disciples was to be understood at a deeper spiritual level. He was saying that not even physical death is to be feared. Why, because it is only a temporary process, and what is to come has the potential to be infinitely better.

You see, when a person dies, their outward physical body looses its' bios or life's energy, but the soul and the spirit, the soul and the spirit are immortal and they live on forever and ever. So the point is - fear only the one who has the power to affect your soul and spirit's future destiny. Subsequently fear the one who has the power to lovingly bring you to heaven or justly send you to hell.

The truth of the matter is - only God has the final say over matters of eternal life and eternal death. Thankfully the devil does not have authority in matters of eternal destiny. Lucifer has been bound and defeated through the saving merits of the Only Begotten Son of God. The good news is that Jesus Christ made it possible for you and me to choose where we want to spend eternity.

However, we need to note that the gospel reading also addresses another very important topic, - and that is the responsibility of sharing one's faith. In fact, the sharing of one's faith is probably the keynote to the whole passage.

Today's gospel reading comes from Jesus' second discourse known as the Missionary Discourse. Jesus delivered this special discourse to His disciples with the specific charge to share with others what He had already taught them. Their job was to go out into the world, preach the gospel, baptize those who came to believe, and then to teach them to observe all that He had commanded; a noble quest indeed, but a quest that could have dire consequences even death itself in the form of martyrdom.

Needless to say Jesus was very upfront with the disciples. He told them because some people hate Him so much that the persecution for sharing their faith might get so intense that some disciples might even decide to back away from their faith in the Christ and cease to follow Him.

To those individuals who would renounce their faith and their God given mission to proclaim the gospel Jesus warned them that there would be consequences, so one had better think twice before starting the journey because, if you deny me before men, my heavenly Father will also deny you.

However Jesus reassured the men that if God provides for the wellbeing of the lowly sparrow, and because He knows the very number of hairs on our heads would He not all the more look out for those called according to His purposes?

Now lets face it, some of the teachings of Jesus can be rather unsettling. Some folks do not like the idea that we should have to fear God. They want God to sort of look the other way whenever they break one of His commandments.

However God has other plans for His people. God's desire is to make of us "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people: that [we] may declare His virtues, who has called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

So before we go on, we need to take a moment to address what it means to fear God. What does the fear of the Lord mean? Like you - I have heard the subject taught from a variety of perspectives, however Proverbs 8:13 states, "The fear of the LORD *is* to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the [willfully contrary] mouth, do I hate."

A little later the writer of the Proverbs records, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10).

Yet for what the entire Bible says about the fear of the Lord, one can still be at somewhat at a loss as to what exactly the fear of the Lord means. However if you were to look in the dictionary the word fear is synonymous with the words respect, reverence, "look up to and honor," and the list goes on.

Unfortunately in our postmodern world the word fear has taken on a somewhat negative connotation thereby leaving a very large gap or hole in the spiritual and moral cultural fabric of what it means to respect and be subject to the proper authority of one who is greater than we.

Therefore, we need not “fear” the legitimacy of fearing of the Lord. A healthy fear of the Lord is a good thing and a principle we need to live by and teach our children.

So then before we conclude, lets address for a moment our role in spreading the gospel and the possibility of persecution and for some even martyrdom. Here we must unequivocally say that one size does not fit all, but all must whole-heartedly support every size. What God has called you to do may not be what He has called me to do and visa versa.

You may or may not be called to give your life to the furtherance of the gospel message, but you are called to support those who have been. You may or may not be called to vocational ministry; however, you are called to support those who have been. You may or may not be called to the ministry of raising children, but you are called to support those who have been so ordained.

By the word support I do not necessarily mean financially support, however it may mean that, but at the very least we can all pray for one another in whatever mission field we may find ourselves in. And let me add a thought here, our mission field can and often does change as we make our journey down the path of redemption. Each step of the way demands a fresh examination of conscience to know that we are in the center of God’s will for our life at that particular moment.

So the question each day becomes, Lord what would you have me do today? What resources and tools have you given to me that I need to be investing in the Kingdom of Heaven? Lord help me to be a good steward of what you have given me, because I do not want to be an unprofitable steward.

Here may I suggest we have a silver lining in the turmoil our world and nation is experiencing. The Covid pandemic has allowed for much added private time to think and pray about life, death, and eternity. The social unrest in our country ought to cause us to think about what is most important for the future of our nation. Will we be governed by a rule of law or by popular opinion and meta-narratives?

Indeed the voices for equal social justice are once again challenging all of us to consider where we stand as Christians in the age-old battle of inequality. The forefront message today is that black lives matter, to that point I think everyone in this room would wholeheartedly agree that any racial inequality deserves our immediate attention and correction.

Unfortunately anarchism and destruction does little to further any cause. When anarchy and evil destruction are allowed and supported - even good causes are destined to end up going awry. It is a well know axiom – two wrongs do not make a right. By the same token, should anyone be condemned or criticized or ostracized for believing that all lives matter - including the unborn?

So then, what would Jesus say about all these issues? Well I know what He would say. I know and you also know what He would say. All we have to do is read the Bible. Living in America today is utopia compared to Palestine during Roman occupation. Talk about civil rights – what civil rights did the Jewish people have in Roman occupied territories?

To try to erase the ills of history by breaking monuments, burning flags, or criticizing the faults of others is a hopeless endeavor at its very best. The memories and monuments of our broken past help

remind us where we do not want to travel again. In fact to erase history is only to repeat it once again.

So in closing, hopefully we can all see how a healthy fear of the Lord is the only option that can serve to bring healing to our land. Moses was so right on when he wrote,

I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Deut. 30:19-20).

If only we would realize that there are consequences for our behavior or lack there of, it would make it a whole lot easier to *do* what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Jesus instructed the people give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. If our priorities are in line with Scripture, then indeed we need not fear any man or ideology or for that matter even death itself because we do not belong to this world. On that note we can rest assured that our Kingdom is in Heaven and our Heavenly Father who sees in secret will in due time surely reward us in the open.

Therefore let us purpose to continue giving our Lord all the glory, honor, and praise in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

