

Sunday/Feast Day Reflections

SYNOPSIS OF OT XII HOMILY (June 25th) for 10-minutes-homily

Introduction: Our Scripture readings for this Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time challenge us to preach Christ through our words and lives without fear.

Scripture lessons: The first reading tells us how the prophet Jeremiah trusted in the power of God while he faced opposition for his prophetic ministry.

The psalmist in today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 69) repeats the same trust in the *kindness and great mercy of God* when he is misunderstood and ill-treated even by his brothers and relatives.

In the second reading, Paul assures the Christians in Rome that they need not be afraid of opposition both because they share in the death of Jesus and his Resurrection and because they are united with Christ, the new Adam, in his Resurrection.

Today's Gospel passage is taken from the end of Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he sends them forth to carry on his mission of preaching and healing. He asks them to live simple lives and to expect opposition and rejection. After having foretold future opposition and persecution, Jesus encourages his disciples to stand firm. Three times they are urged, "*Do not fear!*" "*Do not be afraid!*" Instead of shrinking from their task, they are to proclaim the Gospel boldly, because they will be protected just as Jeremiah was assured of God's protection. Hence, Jesus commands his disciples not to fear their persecutors. He presents before them the image of the sparrow to reinforce the disciples' trust and hope in God. The readings hint at the opposition we future Christians will encounter as we carry on the work of Jesus in the world, and they encourage us to persevere in doing the work of Jesus. They assure us that we will be successful, despite the opposition we encounter.

Life messages: 1) We need not be afraid because our life is in the hands of a loving God. Sometimes we are afraid that we will make a wrong decision. At other times, we are afraid of what others will think when we speak up for Jesus. We are afraid of what the future will bring our children. We are also afraid of growing old. Sometimes we are afraid of what bad health will bring us. At the root of these fears is the fear of loss. Every fear we have is grounded in the knowledge that we have something or someone to lose. I can lose my job, family, house, money, health and even life itself. Rejection and loss are the basis of our

fears. But we forget one thing: whatever trouble or crisis affects us, we know that God understands it better than we ourselves. Our Heavenly Father knows exactly what is happening. What a release from fear it is to know that God is on our side; that our life is in the hands of a loving God! The next time fear grips our life we need to remember that being faithful to Christ wherever we meet him in this life is much more important than our fear of rejection and loss. Also, let us take a moment to recall some of the great promises of God. Let us remind ourselves that God cares – we are each a dear child of his and He cares for each of us. "*Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" The last verse of Psalm 27 sums it up nicely, "*Trust in the Lord. Have Faith; do not despair. Trust in the Lord.*"

OT XII [A] (June 25): Jer 20:10-13; Rom 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

Homily starter anecdote: # 1: "Don't be afraid! We have four bishops to pray for us." An elderly woman named Maude had a window seat on a big 747 jetliner that had just taken off for Rome from New York. She had been saving for years to fulfill her dream to visit the Eternal City. But it was her first flight, and she was terrified. Even the stately presence of four bishops seated behind her didn't help. With fear and trembling she finally opened her eyes and peered out the window, just in time to see one of the plane's four engines break loose from the wing and disappear into the clouds. "We're going to die!" she cried out. "We're going to die!" The stewardess consulted with the pilot who announced to the passengers that everything was under control that they could fly back to New York and land safely with three engines. But Maude continued to cry out, "We're going to die!" The stewardess went to her and said, "Don't worry, my dear, God is with us. We have only three engines, but look, we have four bishops to pray for us." To which Maude replied, "I'd rather have four engines and three bishops!" In today's Gospel Jesus gives us three reasons why we should not be afraid and why we should have the courage of our Christian convictions.

2: Counting the hairs on your head: ("*Even all the hairs on your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" Matthew 10: 26-33): It was just a few weeks after her surgery; the chemotherapy treatments had begun. Every morning, she would comb her hair — and every morning she would pull out another clump of her beautiful hair from the brush. This side effect was hitting her harder and harder. One morning, she felt the top of her head and, for the first time, she could count the strands. But she felt strangely at peace. She held each strand — just as God, in his providence, could count them from the moment God breathed his life into her. She became aware of God present in the love of her family and friends who were supporting and

suffering with her. She remembers: "I felt comfort knowing that God knew how many strands were in my brush, on my pillow, in my hat, and in my hand. God had counted them all. With or without my hair, God knew me and what my future held. I was still afraid — of the cancer, of the chemo, the upcoming brain scan, and its results — but I knew that God would be with me through it all." **May we find peace and reason to hope in the providence of God who has "counted . . . all the hairs of your head," a providence that manifests itself in the love of family, the comfort of friends, the support of church and community.** [Adapted from "I lost my hair but not my faith" by Kathryn Lay, *Catholic Digest*, May 2008.]

3: Fearless St. Chrysostom. Fidelity to God under persecution can manifest itself in many forms. Chrysostom was the Church leader of Constantinople in the fourth century when Rome was persecuting the Church. The Roman emperor had him arrested and charged with being a Christian, saying that if Chrysostom did not renounce Christ, then the emperor would have him banished from the kingdom. Chrysostom responded to the threat by saying that the emperor could not do so, "because the whole world is my Father's Kingdom." "Then," replied the emperor, "I will take away your life." To which Chrysostom said, "You cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God." Next threatened with the loss of his treasure, this saint replied, "You cannot, for my treasure is in Heaven where my heart is." The emperor made one last effort: "Then I will drive you away from here and you shall have no friend left." But again, Chrysostom responded, "You cannot, for I have one Friend from whom you can never separate me. I defy you for you can do me no harm." You can do me no harm!

Introduction: Our Scripture readings for this Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time call us to preach Christ through our words and lives without fear. The first reading tells us how the prophet Jeremiah trusted in the power of God while he faced opposition for his prophetic ministry. The psalmist in today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 69) repeats the same trust in the *kindness and great mercy of God* when he is misunderstood and ill-treated even by his brothers and relatives. In the second reading, Paul assures the Christians in Rome that they need not be afraid of opposition both because they share in the death of Jesus and his Resurrection and because they are united with Christ, the new Adam, in his Resurrection. Today's Gospel passage is taken from the end of Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he sends them forth to carry on his mission of preaching and healing. He asks them to live simply and to expect opposition and rejection. After having predicted future opposition and persecution, Jesus encourages his disciples to stand firm. Three times they are urged, "*Do not fear!*" "*Do not be afraid!*" Instead of shrinking from

their task, they are to proclaim the Gospel boldly because they will be protected, just as Jeremiah was assured of God's protection. Hence, Jesus commands his disciples not to fear their persecutors. He presents before them the image of the sparrow to reinforce the disciples' trust and Hope in God. The readings hint at the opposition we future Christians will encounter as we carry on the work of Jesus in the world, and they encourage us to persevere in doing the work of Jesus. They assure us that we will be successful despite the opposition we encounter.

The first reading: Jer 20:10-13: The first reading, taken from the prophecy of Jeremiah, like today's Gospel, reflects on the sufferings of the believer. Jeremiah experienced the dangers posed by his friends, and even his family because he spoke the words given him by Yahweh. He lived from about 650 BC to 580 BC. Most of his work was in Judah's capital, Jerusalem. Jeremiah tried to keep the people and the kings faithful to God in a world of political intrigue. He met active hostility. Nevertheless, Jeremiah was confident that God would not let his enemies overcome him. He declared, "*But the Lord is with me, like a mighty Champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph.*" He praised God for salvation before he actually experienced it. "*Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!*" The passage from Jeremiah contains three voices and three addressees. There is the overall narrator, there is Jeremiah himself, and there are his enemies.

The second reading: Rom 5:12-15: Paul assures the faithful followers of Jesus that they need not be afraid of opposition because they share in the death of Jesus and in His Resurrection. With words of encouragement Paul explains why, in spite of the bitter experience of opposition, their work will succeed. Since Jesus, by His death and Resurrection, has conquered sin, Jesus' followers will ultimately succeed in carrying out his work, despite the opposition they encounter. Paul describes Jesus as the new Adam. Where the first Adam brought sin and death into the world, the second Adam brings grace and life. The passage tells us that we have died with Christ to the law, to sin, to self and to the world. We need not be afraid of those who oppose us, for we are united with Christ in his Resurrection. In the end, those who oppose Christ will be dishonored, and those who have remained faithful will be redeemed and blessed with eternal life.

Exegesis: Have no fear. Jesus gives three reasons why his apostles, and we, should not be frightened. The first reason is that opponents will not be able to prevent Jesus' followers from succeeding in their mission because God will expose their evil plans and deeds: "*nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered.*" The Lord

"will bring to light the hidden things of darkness" (1 Cor 4:5), and will vindicate the faithful. That God will not permit evil to win is the promise of v. 26.

The second reason not to be afraid is the limited power of our opponents. They can kill the body, which dies all too soon anyway, but have no power over the soul. Only God has power over eternity. The Gospel identifies two fears that the apostles had: fear of false accusation and conviction, and fear of bodily harm and death. Tradition has it that almost all the apostles died the violent death of martyrdom. Some of them ended up being crucified on the cross, like Peter and Andrew; beheaded, like James and Paul; flayed alive, like Bartholomew; or thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil, like John (who survived without a blister, suffered exile, then freed and died of old age, the last of the original apostles). When the Old Testament mentions fear of God (Psalm 2:11; 15:4; 19:9; 22:23; 25:12, etc.) it generally means giving due respect to God. Respect is an attitude proper to a free person. God does not threaten to throw us into Hell; rather He reminds us that to lose Him by sin is to lose ourselves also--and that is Hell. There is no reason to fear God because He does not wish that any one should perish. He has sent Christ to provide salvation for all. Fear of God overcomes human fear: "Perfect Love casts out fear" (1 Jn 4:18).

The third reason we should not be afraid is God's compassionate love. We are more important to God than sparrows. Matthew speaks of two sparrows sold for one penny. The God who cares for a trivial bird like the sparrow also cares about our smallest problems – even the hairs on our heads are counted. While this is an encouraging assurance, it may be difficult to believe in the midst of persecution. But God knows everything that we go through – nothing that happens to us escapes Him. When we feel lonely and abandoned, when it seems that our prayers are unanswered, God knows and cares. Jesus concludes by saying, "*So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows.*" In other words, the perfect antidote for fear is trust in God. God is our shelter and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not be afraid... (Psalm 45:1, 2. Confer also Psalm 27:1,2, Psalm 91:1,2)

The necessity of loyalty in Christian life. If we are loyal to Jesus in this life, Jesus will be loyal to us in the life to come. On the other hand, if we are too proud to acknowledge that Christ is our Lord and Savior, He will not acknowledge us in the next life. In the early Church, Christians had the courage of their convictions, knowing very well that this might result in their losing their lives. Hence, we must not deny God through our silence, whether in word or deed. Denial by deeds arises from actions that do not match our profession of Faith. We must not be ashamed

to behave as people of Faith and proclaim our Christian convictions when necessary.

Revelation of hidden things and triumph of truth. *"There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed and nothing secret that will not be made known,"* This is not a threat that God will expose some sin we had forgotten. Jesus speaks these words as Good News, as a reason not to be afraid of persecution. These verses promise that the evil motives and the wickedness of the persecutors will someday become a matter of public knowledge. At the Last Judgment, the persecutors will not be able to hide their sin. It will eventually come to light and to judgment. When that happens, those who have been persecuted will be vindicated before God and before the world. Verses 26-27 promise the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness. We are challenged to trust in the loving God who continually saves us in the events of our lives. We are sheltered, protected and wrapped in God's love. Hence, we are free – free of fear – free to live – free to bear witness to Christ through our lives.

Life messages: 1) Be not afraid: Sometimes we are afraid that we will make a wrong decision. At other times, we are afraid of what others will think when we speak up for Jesus. We are afraid of what the future will bring our children. We are also afraid of growing old. Sometimes we are afraid of what bad health will bring us. At the root of these fears is the fear of loss. Every fear we have is grounded in the knowledge that we have something or someone to lose. I can lose my job, family, house, money, health and even life itself. Rejection and loss are the basis of our fears. But we forget one thing: whatever trouble or crisis affects us, we know that God understands it better than we ourselves do. Our Heavenly Father knows exactly what is happening. What a release from fear it is to know that God is on our side; that our life is in the hands of a loving God. The next time fear grips our life we need to remember that being faithful to Christ wherever we meet him in this life is much more important than our fear of rejection and loss. Also let us take a moment to recall some of the great promises of God. Let us remind ourselves that God cares – we are each a dear child of His and He cares for each of us. *"Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."* The last verse of Psalm 27 sums it up nicely, *"Trust in the Lord. Have Faith; do not despair. Trust in the Lord."*

JOKE OF THE WEEK

1. Fear of monster under the bed: A man has been visiting a therapist because he has had a fear of monsters living under his cot. The man

has been seeing this doctor for months. Every time he would come in, the doctor would ask, "Have you made any progress?" Every time the man would say "No". The man decided to go and see another doctor. When he went back to his first doctor, the doctor asked, "Have you made any progress?" he said "Yes, I am feeling all better now!" The doctor asked, "What happened?" The man said, "I went to another doctor and he cured me in one session!" The doctor asked, "What did he tell you?" The man said "He just told me to cut off all four legs of my cot and leave no space for the monster".

2. No Fear: The devil entered the house of an alcoholic. But the drunkard just ignored him. The surprised devil asked him "Do you know who I am?"

"Why of course I know who you are," the man calmly replied. "You're Satan."

"And you're not afraid of me like the others?" the devil asked somewhat puzzled. To which the drunkard replied, "No. Why should I be? I've been married to your sister for the last 25 years."

3. Fear of Sunday (Author Unknown) Fwd by Rev. Deacon Gary Thibodeau)

To make it possible for everyone to attend Church next Sunday, we are going to have a special "No Excuse Sunday":

- a) Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in."
- b) There will be a special section with lounge chairs who feel that our pews are too hard.
- c) Eye drops will be available for those with tired eyes from watching T.V. late Saturday night.
- d) We will have steel helmets for those who say " The roof would cave in if I ever came to Church."
- e) Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church is too cold and fans for those who say it is too hot.
- f) Score cards will be available for those who wish to list the hypocrites present.
- g) Relatives and friends will be in attendance for those who can't go to Church and cook dinner, too.
- h) We will distribute "Stamp Out Stewardship" buttons for those who feel that Church is always asking for money.
- i) One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to seek God in nature.
- k) Doctors and nurses will be in attendance for those who plan to be

sick on Sunday.

l) The sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who never have seen the Church without them.

m) We will provide hearing aids for those who can't hear the preacher and cotton for those who say he is too loud.

12- Additional anecdotes will be appended to the homily uploaded in our parish website