

Homily – 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Matthew 10.26-33

A person can be forgiven for thinking that living life as God invites us to live is a perilous, risky business. Our readings seem to have an undertone of negativity, as does our own world these days. What with Covid-19 and the calls for justice and integrity in society and its structures, we are surrounded by challenges. For that reason, our readings are most appropriate for our times because each of them offers an answer. Jeremiah, the Psalmist, Paul and Jesus each speak positively about how and why we should not be downcast or negative, even in turbulent and trying times.

Jeremiah, a reluctant prophet if ever there was one, is complaining to God, and not for the first time, of how his prophesying has earned him nothing but opposition. Both the rulers and the people reject his message, even to the point that he feels his life threatened. *Terror is all around! Denounce him! We might well ask, have I ever felt threatened because of a stand I took on behalf of God and my faith, or of justice and charity? Have I ever been uncomfortable in speaking out about the righting of wrongs, individual or social? Or has my fear and my uncomfortableness induced me to be quiet, to just let the situation pass? Or have we been like Jeremiah who recognized his fear and uncomfortableness and then, relying on the grace God provided, spoke and acted with a willingness to accept whatever the consequence might be, confident that God will see him through? That is the challenge Jeremiah offers us - do we speak the message of the gospel no matter what the cost?*



The psalmist also begins on a negative note, speaking about *reproach* and *shame*, of being a *stranger* and *alien* even within the family circle, the place where one should be most at home. Yet because of trust and faith in God, the

psalmist has a positive outlook and actually foresees a time, *an acceptable time*, when God will come to the rescue because *the Lord hears the needy and does not despise his own that are in bonds*. And Paul in his letter to the Romans writes of sin and its oppressive burden, but they are conquered by the saving actions of Jesus. *For if many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.*

Then we hear Jesus tell us, as he told his followers in the gospel reading, *fear no one*. How do I react to this statement of Jesus? Maybe it will help us if we look at where this is in Matthew's gospel. It is in the middle of Jesus' commissioning of the twelve apostles as he prepares them for their first mission of evangelization. He is sending them out to preach as he preached



and to do as he has been doing. This may sound like a pretty good assignment. After all, who wouldn't want to be able to cure the sick and heal the lame, drive out evil spirits and so forth? However, the catch is that he has also told them that to do as he has been doing is going to have a price. They will not always be welcomed. People will not always be grateful. He has warned them about floggings, imprisonments, betrayals, even by members of one's own family.

He has made it eminently clear that to give witness to him and his message of the love of the Father for us is going to be fraught with danger, with suffering, and it is against this background that Jesus speaks these words of comfort and support. We are careful to note that Jesus does not take back these warnings, he does not say that no harm will come to them; he tells them to *fear no one* because the only harm that can come their way is bodily harm if they remain faithful.

Just as the Father cares for all of creation and is aware of everyone's needs, so is God aware of our needs and will protect us from the death we should all fear, the spiritual death caused by sin. The follower of Jesus can be sure that when we take a stand for truth and justice in Jesus' name, no harm of account will befall us. Oh, we may be unpopular, we may be criticized, we may be scorned, we may be ridiculed, probably mocked, we may even lose friends; but, Jesus says, these are not the evil to fear. Fear the evil that tolerates lies, that defends injustice, that looks the other way, that does not want to disturb things. Today we pray for the wisdom to see the path forward for our society and for ourselves as Christians, living and witnessing in the name of Jesus Christ.

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