

34 Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Jeremiah 20:7,10-13

Psalm 69

Year A  
Romans 5:12-15

June 25, 2017  
Matthew 10:26-33

In today's Gospel, Jesus is instructing His Apostles to "fear no one. . ." nor are they to be intimidated. Jesus is preparing them for the day when He will no longer be with them. The Apostles are feeling fear in their hearts because Jesus will soon be leaving them. They have good reason to be fearful, knowing that they will have to face a lot of hardship and persecution, and even death, for proclaiming Christ to all nations. So, not once but three times Jesus says to them, "*Do not be afraid.*"

Fear can paralyze us. It can freeze us and make us immobile. It can prevent us from both thinking and acting according to our Catholic convictions. We may want to keep still and say nothing. We may not want to rock the boat. Many people today are living in some kind of fear in proclaiming and living out their faith and commitment to the teachings of Jesus.

This is especially true today when many of our children have abandoned their Catholic faith. Parents are living in fear as they strive to witness their faith to their children and encouraging them to return to the Church. In China, the Catholic Church is underground because the people fear persecution and imprisonment. And in many other parts of the world people face fear in practicing and living out their Catholic faith.

From today's readings, we discover that *courage* is a necessary virtue in leading a life of committed faith. As people of faith and trust in God, we believe that He will give us the courage to overcome whatever fears happen in our lives. Jesus tells us these words in today's Gospel, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

In the early 1900's, there was a young girl of eleven years old living in Italy who lived in fear. She refuses to submit to the sexual advances of a young man who threatened to kill her and her mother if she said anything.

One day, the 20-year-old man was overcome with lust and attacks her. The young girl fought off her attacker and said repeatedly, "No, it's a sin! God

does not want it!” Whereupon, the attacker, overwhelmed by fear and anger, began to strike at her blindly with a long dagger and several blows passed through her thin frail body.

The young girl was rushed to the hospital and, despite the efforts of the doctors to save her life, she died. But before she died the young girl forgave her attacker and asked to receive our Blessed Lord in Holy Communion.

Her attacker was sentenced to life in prison. The man lived in fear because he had killed this innocent young girl. He remained very bitter until one day the young girl appeared to him in his prison cell and told him she forgave him. Her forgiveness caused the man to have a change of heart and he no longer had to live in fear because of his guilt he was still feeling for what he done to her.

Sometime later, he was released from prison for good behaviour. The man, along with the young girl’s mother, was present in Rome in 1950 for the canonization of this innocent young girl. Her name is St. Maria Goretti.

St. Maria Goretti believed these same words that Jesus speaks to us in today’s Gospel, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” The Apostles and countless men and women have throughout history, and even in our own community, believed these words of Jesus.

If we are also to be steadfast witnesses to our faith, we can find strength in the realization of Christ’s authority and power. In Philippians 4:13 we read, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” *Christ can do all things!* We must allow Christ’s love to be poured into our hearts so that fear will not cripple our lives and prevent us from being the kind of person we want to be in living our Catholic faith.

The fear we have of being laughed at, scorned or regarded as weaklings can cause us to fail to stand up for what we know in our hearts is just and right, even though as bearers of the Word of Christ we may suffer ridicule and rejection. Jesus urges us to bear witness to Him openly and to be fearless in making a stand for truth and justice. As baptized Catholics, we are called to have

no fear to proclaim the Good News of God's Kingdom not only in words, but by the way we live today through our actions and by loving our brothers and sisters.

The philosopher, Edmund Burke, said: "For evil to triumph, all that is required is for good people to remain silent." When these things take place, pressure in the face of temptation is to abandon our Catholic principles because of the smirks and sneers of others which arise daily and challenge our loyalty to the teachings Jesus has taught us. Though we may suffer for our faith, God our Father will never forget or abandon us. Steadfast in our faith, we must resist Satan's tactics, because Satan is the enemy who is always seeking the ruin of souls.

There are many people who oppose Jesus and His teachings. Jesus says in the Gospel today, "whoever denies Me before others, I also will deny before My Father in heaven." To live our Catholic faith by following the teachings of Jesus, of not denying Him, takes *courage and commitment and faith*. Yes, we will have to face fear on the road to the eternal Kingdom but we have to remember that Jesus is with us always until the end of time.

A close-knit prayer community helps to diminish our feelings of isolation and brings us comfort. Attending Sunday Mass and other church services here, or gathering with prayer partners, will never fail to uplift us from our burdens, concerns, and fears.

In our First Reading, although Jeremiah in the course of his life is thrown in a pit and beaten many times for proclaiming God's word, he did not succumb to evil and fear but rather, he sang a song of praise: "Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers." Our Master, our Lord Jesus Christ, is within us to comfort us, to strengthen us and to deliver us from the hands of evildoers.

Let us remember that even in these days, when our Catholic belief in God and obedience to His commands is under constant attack, we can continue to walk firmly along the path of discipleship, even though we are constantly attacked by Satan and people to deny Christ and His Church.

Remember that Christ is in us! Christ's love surrounds us! Christ will never abandon us! If we remain faithful to Christ, He will acknowledge us before His Heavenly Father. Do not lose heart! Remember that the Spirit of Jesus who is in us is greater than any evil and fear in the world.