

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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Matt. 10:26 Jesus said to his disciples: “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Matt. 10:32 “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

The memory of the execution of Jesus was still fresh in the Christian Communities. Various accounts of his passion were in circulation. Everyone knew that it was dangerous to follow someone who had ended his life so infamously. They remembered a saying of Jesus: *The disciple is not greater than the master.*”

Jesus did not want his disciples to have any illusions about their future with him. Nobody could think of truly following him without in some way sharing his fate. At some time someone will reject, ill-treat, insult or condemn them. What should they do?

His answer flows from within him: *“Do not be afraid.”* Fear is bad. It should never paralyse his disciples. They must never keep silent. They must not on any account stop propagating his message.

Jesus is going to explain to them how they have to face persecution. With him the revelation of the Good News of God has begun. They must trust God. What is now covered and hidden from many will one day be plainly known. The mystery of God will be made known as his love of humankind and his project for a happier life for all.

The followers of Jesus are called to take an active part from now on in that process of revelation: *“What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roof.”* What he explains them at sunset before retiring for the night must be broadcast without fear in the light of day. What I say to you in your ears, proclaim it from the roofs. What is whispered in your ears so that it reaches your hearts, you must make public.

Jesus insists that they should not be afraid. The person who is with me has nothing to fear. The last judgement will be a surprise for him or her. The Father in heaven will be the judge, the one who loves you without limit. I myself will be your advocate who will be on your side. Can anyone inspire us with more confidence in times of trial?

Jesus thought of his followers as a group of believers who would side with him without fear. Why don't we feel entirely free to open up new pathways more faithful to Jesus? Why do we not dare to set forth in simple, clear, and concrete terms the essential demands of the gospel?

JOSÉ A PAGOLA - Following in the Footsteps of Jesus

Fear can take many different forms. We worry about our families, health, financial security. In places troubled by war there are deeper fears: can I manage to feed my children? Will we have to leave our home in order to be safe? Will we survive? When we are afraid it is natural to question God, even to lose faith. When Jesus says ‘Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul’ he does not promise that we will come to no harm, but he affirms that God is with us, whatever happens. God is present in the fear and messiness of life, caring for us so intimately that the hairs on our head are counted.

Admitting your deepest fears can be daunting. Looking back, what has brought you comfort at a time when you were afraid?

The sparrow, one of the smallest of birds, is cared for and loved by God. This is a reminder that no matter how insignificant we feel or how challenging the circumstances, God is with us. Today, recall the times or places when you felt God's supporting presence.

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - Go Deeper

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Our times have an air of instability and everyone feels the sense of upheaval and unpredictability. Fear is perfectly understandable. Something similar may be said of our lives as believers. From a “church” point of view, we wonder who will be in church in the coming years and who will preside at the Lord’s Supper. From a personal point of view, familiar faith affirmations seem no longer as tenable as they were. And yet, at the centre of the faith project stands not my condition or even my faith, but all that God did for us Jesus’ death and resurrection. As Paul exclaims

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we encounter death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom 8:35–39)

KIERAN O’MAHONY OSA - www.tarsus.ie

POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. ‘Do not fear’ is the unifying theme in this passage which is set in the context of a mission sermon by Jesus, preparing his disciples for what lay ahead. He urges them to have courage in speaking his message and living his message, drawing strength from their trust in the Father whose care for us exceeds his care for hundreds of sparrows. How has trust in God been a source of strength in life for you?

2. The body/soul terminology presupposes an anthropology in which the soul represents one’s real self and the body is the perishable shell. For Jesus the important thing is to be true to one’s real self, even if this does involve some material or physical loss or pain. When you have had that kind of courage, what was it like for you?

3. There is no such thing as secret discipleship. It is in declaring their allegiance to Jesus that his followers will find life. They will be the losers if they hide their discipleship. Does this resonate with your experience?

JOHN BYRNE OSA - Intercom

Having called the Twelve, Jesus now instructs them for the task and times that lie ahead. They must understand from the outset that there is a price to be paid. If Jesus was persecuted so too will they be but his repeated appeal to them in this passage is “Do not be afraid.” Their lack of fear is to be based on their knowledge of God’s abiding love of them in all circumstances and this will see them through the toughest of times. There is of course a challenge in this: no-one can be a secret Christian in the sense of just for him or her self. We are to declare for Christ in public and be prepared for the consequences. In the early Church there were times when this resulted in persecution and even martyrdom, and so the challenging aspect of these words would have been very clear to those who first read them.

SEAN GOAN - Let the Reader Understand

GENERAL COMMENT

The sayings are in metaphorical language and therefore open to different interpretations. We are not free to interpret them as we like however; our interpretation must be guided by the original historical context.

The context here is that Jesus has just warned his disciples that they will be persecuted as he was (verses 24 and 25). We interpret the sayings, therefore, as words of encouragement addressed to those who are being unfairly condemned. In verse 26, for example, “do not be afraid” means “do not be afraid of those who are condemning you unfairly.”

Every single thing we do, provided it has a good and constructive purpose, is helping our world grow towards its common goal.” ...Leonard Cheshire

Lord, when we take a stand on principle we come across as impractical or foolish.

Help us to fear nothing so much as to be disowned in your presence, and keep as our goal the following of Jesus rather than the approval of society.

To understand Scripture, we must stop acting like mere spectators.” ...Karl Barth

Lord, we pray for preachers of the Gospel.

Don’t let them become superficial in their preaching, to look for the limelight or for quick results.

Teach them to be true to the dark aspects of life for it is there that they will learn what they must tell in the daylight.

Help them to be comfortable with silence, because it is what they hear in whispers that they must proclaim on the housetops.

Lord, we remember with gratitude the great people we have known:

– world famous figures like Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Archbishop Romero;

– members of our families;

– leaders in our communities.

We thank you that they were never afraid of what could kill their bodies alone

– prison, torture or the assassin’s bullet;

– unpopularity, failure, or losing their jobs.

But they were mortally afraid of other things

– of insincerity,

– of being unfaithful to themselves

of whatever could destroy their souls.

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL - Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels