

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 25 June 2023

Scriptures: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Matt. 10:26-33

Homily: Fr. Ken

It is real people with their real fears that Jesus is addressing in today's Gospel. Three times he implores us not to be afraid. It could perhaps be discerned in that threefold "Do not be afraid" directive, a reference to the three kinds of fear that commonly trouble people.

First, there are hidden fears, the fears that people cannot or will not or dare not share with others. They are fears about health, sinfulness, the future, and close friends. Of this Jesus says: "Do not be afraid...everything now hidden will be made clear". Indeed, it is already fully revealed to our God in heaven. God knows all, understands all, and, through Jesus, urges us not to allow fear to get the better of us.

Second, there is fear of dangers from outside: fear of wars, the breakdown of law and order, fear of increasing violence, and the fear of COVID-19. Jesus says: "Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul". Our God cares for each one of us. Remember the analogy of the two sparrows. Should one of those tiny birds fall to the ground, God knows all about it. And God knows all about each one of us as well; God knows us through and through, because **all lives matter to God**. "Even all the hairs of your head are counted".

Third, there is a fear not unlike that of a child lost in a department store. It is the fear that people sense themselves so small, so insignificant, so unimportant. They feel lost in the immensity of the universe, lost like a speck of dust amidst the billions of people who are home to the earth, lost as a drop of water is lost in the ocean. There are those among the human family who in fact find it hard to believe that God, with this vast

universe to care for, can give us anything more than a token of divine attention. Jesus says again, "there is no need to be afraid": as he has told us. God knows the plight of tiny sparrows, to which Jesus adds: "You are worth more than hundreds of sparrows".

The words that Jesus uses, "Do not be afraid", are especially powerful because the very person who speaks those words is our friend, Jesus, who really knows us, who loves us, and whom we love. Jesus is the friend whom we can totally and fully trust.

Life without friends would be intolerable. It is in the light of all that human friendship means that we can sing out in the words of the old popular hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus". It is Jesus who brings us renewed courage every day. Over and over again he urges us not to be afraid. That doesn't mean that all our fears suddenly vanish but rather that they don't paralyze us, they no longer dominate our lives, because like Jeremiah in the first scripture reading, we can say, "the Lord is with me, like a mighty hero".

The promise of Jesus is to take away our final fear, the fear of what awaits us beyond death. Jesus tells us that he will intercede for us with God, acknowledge us as his friends and thus guarantee us a place in that home of heaven where all tears are swept away and all fears disappear: the eternal home of joy, love, and peace.