

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - Fear the Lord and do not be afraid of anything

June 21, 2020.

This Sunday, most of the people (countries) in the world are celebrating Father's Day, a day of honouring fatherhood and paternal bonds, as well as the influence of fathers in society. In some Catholic countries of Europe, it has been celebrated on March 19 on Saint Joseph's Day since the Middle Ages. It is also common for Catholics to honour their "spiritual father," their parish priest, on Father's Day. So **Happy Father's Day** to all fathers!

If we have a chance to ask young Jesus, "Are you afraid of your Dad?" I bet the answer most likely is Yes. Afraid (fear) does not, in biblical sense, mean scared or frightened. *It means that we should respect and be more concerned with fulfilling the House rules (laws of God).* Same as when we **Fear God**. It does not mean that we should be afraid of God. In the Gospel reading (Matthew 10:26-33), Jesus says to his Apostles, "**Fear no one. ... Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul.**" He tells his Apostles and us to keep our priorities straight. He tells us that we should not even be afraid of people who could kill us. In one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament, Jesus says, "**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not a single sparrow will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.**" The Lord also says in that passage, "**Fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell.**" This is not a popular concept in our society. We emphasize God's compassion and mercy but we tend to refuse to acknowledge His justice: sitting on the right side of God to judge the living and the dead. In our own minds, we transform God into an imaginary figure that will not respond to our rejection of His life and laws. So we continue to sin.

In the Second Reading St. Paul reminds us that because of Adam, the "one man", sin and death entered the world and spread to everyone, everywhere, throughout human history. The effects of that Original Sin still rage unchecked in many ways. But it was nothing compared to the grace that would flow from one man standing up to it: Our Lord Jesus Christ who showed mankind how they could turn from sin and back to God again (Romans 5:12-15). Even with the Law (the Ten Commandments) as a blueprint for life, death still ravaged the world due to sin. But the Father did not leave us to our fate. He sent his Son, who wiped away the sins of the world in Baptism and brought the grace of God back to us again. **We have nothing to fear as long as we fear the Lord.** How much more does God value those who are made in His image and likeness? **We are worth infinitely more than many sparrows.**

The first reading from the *Book of the Prophet Jeremiah* (20:10-13) is referred to as the *Confession of Jeremiah*, relates how the King's counsellors were looking for ways by which they could denounce him to the King, condemn him, even have him killed. It all started in the beginning of the 6BC when the Kingdom of Judah and its capital Jerusalem were threatened by the invading Babylonians. How could the tiny Kingdom of Judah withstand such a huge enemy? The King looked to his counsellors whose advice was to befriend their pagan neighbours thus putting their trust in the pagans rather than in God. The King consulted Jeremiah whom he respected, someone who knew the truth and was not afraid to proclaim it. Jeremiah told the King that **the Babylonians were agents of God about to punish the Jewish people for adopting pagan ways.** The King needed to lead the people in trusting God rather than the pagans. Despite his pain and tribulations, Jeremiah is showing us the assurance that God is our mighty champion and there is no fear in the battle that God is going to win for us. **He decided to fear God rather than be afraid of men.**

2020 is a frightening year: Coronavirus pandemic, racial killing, flooding, hail storms .. Will the coronavirus destroy half the population of the world similar to the Black Plague that destroyed half the population in Europe? We certainly pray that it will not, but we also know that alive or dead, what matters most is that we belong to the Lord. Will we be disparaged because we are against abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, taking children from their parents? We certainly will be attacked for promoting the totality of respect for life from conception to natural death, but disparagement does not matter as long as we are united to God. If we have reverence and respect for the Lord, if we do all we can to be God-fearing, then we do not have to be afraid of anything. As Pope Francis once said, **“The media only writes about the sinners and the scandals, but that’s normal, because a tree that falls makes more noise than a forest that grows.”** If prophet Jeremiah is still alive today, he probably would say all these happenings were agents from God about to punish his people for adopting pagan ways of living - materialism, political benefits, pride, prejudice, wealth, prestige, pleasure ... We Catholics are blessed to have a leader, Pope Francis who, like Jeremiah, is not afraid to proclaim the truth!

US has just celebrated the **Juneteenth** holiday. It commemorates June 19, 1865, when Union general Gordon Granger read federal orders in Galveston, Texas, that all previously enslaved people in Texas were free. But are blacks in US still discriminated nowadays? Yes. The racial tragic event that took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25 2020 when the whole world witnessed the death of Mr. George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement officers is profoundly troubling and entirely unacceptable. It’s scary such would still happen. Nobody is colourblind when it comes to race. And God doesn’t want us to be colourblind. He wants us to be **colour blessed**. We need him to help us start seeing people the way He sees them. Look at their heart, not their skin. It’s the first step towards overcoming prejudice in our life, and in the world around us. As Pope Francis commented on this tragic event in his June 3 General Audience **“We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.”**

You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst. You shall wander far in safety though you do not know the way. You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand. You shall see the face of God and live. Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest. If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown. If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed. If you stand before the power of hell and death is at your side, know that I am with you through it all. (John Michael Talbot – *Be Not Afraid* Lyrics)