



FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL
GROUP CATECHESIS

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Do Not Be Afraid

Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the house-tops.

'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

'So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.' ■



GOSPEL REFLECTION

Fr Graham Schmitzer

In today's Gospel, Jesus advises his close followers that suffering is to be expected in the life of a true disciple. Anyone who is serious about doing God's work will find the Cross at one time or another.

During the Second World War, a man called Victor Franke underwent the most severe form of persecution in a concentration camp. He discovered that in very difficult circumstances, the only freedom one has is the freedom to adapt an attitude towards the situation, and this is what he did. He discovered that if we have a WHY to live for, we can live the HOW. Everything the world values had been taken away

from him. But no one could take from him the memory of his wife's love, or the truth that he had a loving Father in heaven that cared for him. He found little spaces in his days in prison when he became more aware of the tender care of his heavenly Father. And thus, he endured the war, strengthened by his ordeal, learning valuable lessons for himself and for others. After the war, Victor Franke wrote down his reflections in a small book called "The search for meaning".

Jesus tells his disciples that however much they feel damaged, harassed, and even persecuted in the fulfilment of the Christian duties, there is within them a kernel of life which withstands all storms and which survives into eternal life. "Do not be afraid of those who kill

the body" or the more superficial aspects of life. Our true lives are indestructible – a bit like plants growing on waste ground. Storms can come and batter them to the ground: sun and wind can burn and beat until only a sorry mess remains, yet weeks later, the plants are standing erect and tall, swaying carelessly in the breeze. Why? Because below the surface the roots sleep in our undisturbed kernel of life, waiting to flower and grow into the fullness of both earthly and eternal life. God is always close to the broken hearted. He dwells unscathed in the heart that is most bruised. ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS

The following reflection arises from a series that Pope Francis did on Christian Hope – an underlying theme of today's Gospel.

Christian hope! It is very important, because hope never disappoints. Optimism disappoints, but hope does not! We have such need, in these times which appear dark, in which we sometimes feel disoriented at the evil and violence which surrounds us, at the distress of so many of our brothers and sisters. We need hope! We feel disoriented and even rather discouraged, because we are powerless and it seems this darkness will never end.

We must not let hope abandon us, because God, with his love, walks with us. "I hope, because God is beside me": we can all say this. Each one of us can say: "I hope, I have hope, because God walks with me". He walks and he holds my hand. God does not leave us to ourselves. The Lord Jesus has conquered evil and has opened the path of life for us.

Let us allow the Lord to teach us what it means to hope. Therefore let us listen to the words of Sacred Scripture, beginning with the Prophet Isaiah, the great Prophet of Advent, the great messenger of hope.

In the second part of his Book, Isaiah addresses the people with his message of comfort: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned" (Is 40:1-2, 3-5). God the Father comforts by raising up comforters, whom he asks to encourage the people, his children, by proclaiming that the tribulation has ended, affliction has ended, and sins have been forgiven. This is what heals the afflicted and fearful heart. This is why the Prophet asks them to prepare the way of the Lord, to be ready to receive his gifts and his salvation.

For the people, comfort begins with the opportunity to walk on God's path, a new path, made straight and passable, a way prepared in the

desert, so as to make it possible to cross it and return to the homeland.

Life is often a desert, it is difficult to walk in life, but if we trust in God it can become beautiful and wide as a highway. Just never lose hope, just continue to believe, always, in spite of everything. When we are before a child, although we have many problems and many difficulties, a smile comes to us from within, because we see hope in front of us: a child is hope! And in this way we must be able to discern in life the way of hope which leads us to find God, God who became a Child for us. He will make us smile, he will give us everything!

It is the little ones with God, with Jesus, who transform the desert of exile, of desperation and loneliness, of suffering, into a level plain on which to walk in order to encounter the glory of the Lord. We have come to the 'point': let us be taught hope. Let us be confident — each one knows what desert he or she is walking in — it will become a garden in bloom. Hope does not disappoint!

TALKING POINTS

1. "Do not be afraid" says Jesus in our Gospel passage. Share with the group some of the fears you have in life – either for yourself or others.
2. Fr Graham points to Victor Franke who discovered that having a purpose or meaning, something to live for, can enable us to overcome great trials and suffering. Has this been the case in your life? How?
3. Pope Francis implores us to rest in the hope and knowledge of God's presence among and within us. Where do you find God's hope in your life?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for each other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Reflect: Jesus, in the Eucharist, gives you his flesh and blood to eat as food and drink – as a way of becoming one with him. Spend some time asking Jesus to show you the ways in which you are already one with him in word and action.

Response: *Jesus we thank you for your life-giving presence in our lives.*

Closing Prayer: Jesus, you give us your body and blood as nourishment for our lives. Grant us, we pray, an ever deepening awareness of your love for us and the ways in which we can become more like you each day.

