

GOSPEL*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.'

REFLECTION OF POPE BENEDICT XVI*22 June 2008*

In this Sunday's Gospel we find two invitations from Jesus: on the one hand to "have no fear" of human beings, and on the other, to "fear" God (cf. Mt 10: 26, 28). We are thus encouraged to reflect on the difference that exists between human fears and the fear of God. Fear is a natural dimension of life. In childhood we experience forms of fear that subsequently are revealed to be imaginary and disappear; other fears emerge later which are indeed founded in reality: these must be faced and overcome with human determination and trust in God. However, especially today, there is a deeper form of fear of an existential type and which sometimes borders on anguish: it is born from a sense of emptiness, linked to a certain culture permeated with widespread theoretical and practical nihilism.

In the face of the broad and diversified panorama of human fears, the Word of God is clear: those who "fear" God "are not afraid". Fear of God, which the Scriptures define as "the beginning of knowledge" coincides with faith in him, with sacred respect for his authority over life and the world.

To be without "fear of God" is equivalent to putting ourselves in his place, to feeling we ourselves are lords of good and evil, of life and death. Instead, those who fear God feel within them the safety that an infant in his mother's arms feels (cf. Ps 130: 2). Those who fear God are tranquil even in the midst of storms for, as Jesus revealed to us, God is a Father full of mercy and goodness. Those who love him are not afraid: "There is no fear in love", the Apostle John wrote, "but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love" (1 Jn 4: 18). Believers, therefore, are not afraid of anything because they know they are in the hands of God, they know that it is not evil and the irrational which have the last word, but rather that the one Lord of the world and of love is Christ, the Word of God Incarnate, who loved us to the point of sacrificing himself for us, dying on the Cross for our salvation.

The more we grow in this intimacy with God, imbued with love, the more easily we overcome any form of fear. In the passage of today's Gospel, Jesus repeats several times the exhortation to have no fear. Jesus reassures us, as he reassured the Apostles and as he did St Paul by appearing to him one night in a vision at a particularly difficult moment in his preaching: "Do not be afraid", he said, "for I am with you" (Acts 18: 9). Strong in the presence of Christ and comforted by his love, the Apostle to the Gentiles, the 2,000th anniversary of whose birth we are preparing to celebrate with a special Jubilee Year, did not even fear martyrdom. May this great spiritual and pastoral event inspire in us too a renewed trust in Jesus Christ who calls us to proclaim and witness to his Gospel without being afraid of anything. I therefore invite you, dear brothers and sisters, to prepare yourselves to celebrate with faith the Pauline Year, which, please God, I shall solemnly inaugurate next Saturday at 6: 00 o'clock in the evening in the Basilica of St Paul Outside-the-Walls, with the liturgy for First Vespers of the Solemnity of Sts Peter and Paul. Let us immediately entrust this ecclesial initiative to the intercession of St Paul and of Mary Most Holy, Queen of Apostles and Mother of Christ, the source of our joy and our peace.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Jesus contrasts fear of the world with fear of God; how does Pope Benedict describe this “fear of God” as something rooted in faith and trust rather than anxiety?



Heart: Pope Benedict speaks of deeper, existential fears that arise from a sense of emptiness; where do you notice these fears in your own life, and how do you respond to them?



Hands: Jesus calls us to acknowledge him openly without fear; what would it look like for you to live and speak your faith more confidently this week, grounded in God’s love?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be.’