

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 rooftops.

'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.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

21 June 2020

In this Sunday's Gospel (cf. Mt 10:26-33) the invitation that Jesus addresses to His disciples resonates: to have no fear, to be strong and confident in the face of life's challenges, as he forewarns them of the adversities that await them. Today's passage is part of the missionary discourse, with which the Teacher prepares the Apostles for their first experience of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Jesus persistently exhorts them to "have no fear". Fear is one of the most terrible enemies of our Christian life. Jesus exhorts: "have no fear", "fear not". And Jesus describes three tangible situations that they will find themselves facing.

First and foremost the hostility of those who would like to stifle the Word of God, by sugar-coating it, watering it down, or by silencing those who proclaim it. In this case, Jesus encourages the Apostles to spread the message of salvation that He has entrusted to them. For the moment, He has transmitted it cautiously, somewhat covertly, among the small group of disciples. But they will utter his Gospel "in the light", that is, openly; and will proclaim it "upon the rooftops" — as Jesus says — that is, publicly.

The second difficulty that Christ's missionaries will encounter is the physical threat against them, that is, direct persecution of them personally, to the point of being killed. This prophesy by Jesus is realized in every age: it is a painful reality, but it attests to the faithfulness of witnesses. How many Christians are persecuted even today throughout the world! They suffer for the Gospel with love, they are martyrs of our days. And we can say with confidence that they are more numerous than those of the earliest times: so many martyrs, just for the fact of being Christians. Jesus advises these disciples of yesterday and today who suffer persecution: "do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (v. 28). We should not allow ourselves to be frightened by those who seek to extinguish evangelizing power with arrogance and violence. Indeed, they can do nothing against the soul, that is, against communion with God: no one can take this away from disciples, because it is a gift from God. The only fear that a disciple should have is that of losing this divine gift, closeness, friendship with God, giving up living according to the Gospel, thereby acquiring moral death, which is the effect of sin.

Jesus indicates as the third type of test that the Apostles will have to face, the sensation, which some may feel, that God himself has abandoned them, remaining distant and silent. Here too, Jesus exhorts them not to fear, because even while experiencing these and other pitfalls, the life of disciples lies firmly in the hands of God who loves us and looks after us. They are like three temptations: to sugar-coat the Gospel, to water it down; second: persecution; and third: the feeling that God has left us alone. Even Jesus suffered this trial in the Garden of Olives and on the Cross: "Father, why have you forsaken me?"; Jesus asks. At times one feels this spiritual barrenness; we must not fear it. The Father takes care of us, because our value is great in His eyes. What matters is frankness, the courage of our witness, our witness of faith: "recognizing Jesus before men" and going forth doing good.

May Mary Most Holy, model of trust and abandonment in God in the hour of adversity and danger, help us never to surrender to despair, but rather always to entrust ourselves to Him and to his grace, because God's grace is ever more powerful than evil.

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: How do the three temptations which Pope Francis speaks about (1. to sugar-coat the Gospel and water it down; 2. persecution and 3. the feeling that God has left us alone), play out in your own life?



Heart: How does it feel to know that ‘every hair on your head has been counted’ by God and that ‘you are worth more than hundred’s of sparrows’?



Hands: How might you go about spreading the gospel message more courageously in your life?

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’.