

Homily 12th Sunday of OT Year A Matt 10:26-33

My dear brothers and sisters, for the last three months there has been ample opportunity for stress, worry, anxiety and fear to creep into our lives. We're worried about our health and the health of our loved ones; we're worried about our jobs and our financial stability.

We're anxious about having to go places where other people are gathered; we get stressed when some don't wear masks or stay six feet away from us. We're stressed, or at least disappointed, over not being able to celebrate special occasions the way we want to.

Well, in the lives of the apostles, there was likewise ample opportunity for stress, worry, anxiety and fear, as they anticipated the mission for which Jesus was preparing them – to go out into the world and “shout out” His good news from the housetops.

We know now that proclaiming the gospel got Jesus nailed to the cross, and all but one of the twelve, the grace of martyrdom. And though the twelfth, John, wasn't put to death, he was exiled to a foreign land.

And yet, three times we hear Jesus assure the apostles they have no reason to fear. And there are plenty of other verses among the gospels where Jesus says, “Do not be afraid” or “Do not worry” or “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

Therefore, on behalf of our Lord and Savior, I say to you, “Be not afraid!” // How do I know this applies equally to the task of acknowledging him before others and the task of living through a months-long pandemic?

I know because of what He says about small birds and about the hairs on our heads. That our heavenly Father is mindful even of sparrows, worth no more than a few cents ... that He is mindful of the number of hairs on our heads, a number which changes daily by the way, means that every detail of our lives is known by God, is valuable to Him, and worthy of His care and concern.

Just to drive the point home, I'll share one of my favorite passages from earlier in Matthew's Gospel. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says to his disciples, “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, or about your body. Look at the birds of the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more important than they?”

“Learn from the way the wildflowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith?”

“So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.”

Now, to be fearless and worry free is not to be reckless and irresponsible. Just because we can confidently count on Jesus, does not mean we should discount the precautions grounded in good sense and science, recommended to deal with this disease.

Remember what Jesus said to Satan in the desert, “You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” In keeping with that provision, I and twenty-seven of your fellow parishioners are doing a great deal to make it safe for us to be here. This is not a sign of our distrust in God. It’s a sign that we recognize His will for us, to be prudent, and not presumptuous.

Regardless of how you feel personally, about the risks around COVID-19, and all the ways it’s changed our lives, there are people out there who are quite fearful. In consideration of their human dignity, as being made like us, in the image and likeness of God ...

... besides “Be not afraid,” I also say to you, “Be humble and honorable, respectful and responsible, selfless and generous, compassionate and patient. For it is the Christian thing to do, to obey all the mandates and guidelines issued by the CDC, the governor, the bishop, your pastor, local business owners, and so on.”

Finally, my friends, EN trust everything to God. Trust IN His Providence. Believe IN, His love for you ... and the one who CAN destroy, both body and soul in Gehenna, will do no such thing. Instead, while He might not prevent periodic hardship from plaguing your life, He will protect you from eternal ruin, and raise you up in glory, to everlasting joy.