

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT Year A  
June 24-25, 2017

*"Fear no one."*

Readings: Jeremiah 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10: 26-33

"Whom do you fear?" If you asked a major league baseball hitter today it might be superstar Clayton Kershaw of the Dodgers. A generation ago, he might say Roger Clemens or Nolan Ryan. If you asked the Axis nations during World War II, they likely most feared General Patton. If you ask women tennis players, whose serve they most fear, it is a no-brainer- Serena Williams.

But if you look to today's Gospel, Jesus tells the Twelve that they should fear no one. How is this possible? Could any of us say that we fear no one? What place, if any, ought fear have in our lives? In societies in which an established morality exists, fear serves as a deterrent to some very bad behavior. There is the fear of rejection, the fear of reprisals or of losing one's standing within a community, all of which coalesce to deter bad behavior. Spiritually, there is certainly a fear of the "loss of heaven and the pains of hell," as recounted in the Act of Contrition.

Today, fewer people fear negative reactions from their behavior, as society is loath to condemn that which was universally rejected. Society fears being intolerant. We coddle college students by calling them kids-they're young adults. We offer counseling to grade school students following a national election, shielding them from the reality that life is not always going to turn out exactly how they want it to turn out.

At other times, we Catholics can too easily fear appearing to be overly zealous about our faith. As society becomes more secularized, we can feel out of the mainstream. Something as simple as praying grace in a restaurant can make observant Catholics uncomfortable. This need not be. Our faith can be both 100% authentic and contemporary.

I think of one of my favorite quotations from Archbishop John Ireland, who whose teaching and preaching was punctuated with a sense of hope for the future, something I must challenge myself to keep ever before me:

“I seek no backward voyage across the sea of time; I will ever press forward. I believe that God intends the present to be better than the past, and the future to be better than the present.”<sup>1</sup>

Fear can paralyze, it can stunt our spiritual growth because we are never at peace. Once again, whom or what do we really fear? Do we worry about disappointing the Lord, or only about appearing out of step with the majority of our peers? Do we fear the possibility of spending eternity apart from God’s loving embrace?

Now we must make an important, though subtle distinction. We must *fear* God, while not being *afraid* of him. The holy Fear of the Lord as a Gift of the Holy Spirit is somewhat different than the kind of fear that Jesus told his disciples they could avoid in today’s Gospel. Scripture affirms that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (*Ps* 110 [111]:10; *Prov* 1: 7) .

What is this fear? For starters, it is most certainly **not** the fear that made Adam and Eve hide “themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (*Gen* 3:8). It is a sincere and reverential feeling that a person experiences before the tremendous majesty of God. Pope Francis taught of this fear:

“Fear of the Lord, instead, is the gift of the Holy Spirit through whom we are reminded of how small we are before God and of his love and that our good lies in humble, respectful and trusting self-abandonment into his hands.”<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop John Ireland, 1889 Speech in Baltimore, for the occasion of the Centenary of the U.S. Catholic Episcopate.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, General Audience Wednesday 11 June 2014

This holy fear is a component of faith, born from knowledge of who God is. It is the same sentiment that we feel before some great spectacle of nature, a giant redwood, a spectacular mountain, the endless shore of lake Superior at sunset. But it is more intense because it is the majesty of God, whom we know created it.

As the psalmist says- “When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place- What is man that you are mindful of him, and a son of man that you care for him? It is feeling small before God’s immensity.

This same Lord, before whom we shrink in awe and wonder, is also a God who loves us unconditionally. If we falter, He will welcome us home when we are truly contrite in our sorrow. Never fear God’s mercy, because it is always in abundance for those whom he loves.

Jesus was telling the apostles that they are more precious to him than anyone or anything. This is why he treats us so lovingly. Have no fear towards those who can only kill the body, for they have no say over our soul. In that which matters most, we belong to the Lord and we rest under the shadow of His wings.