

12th Sunday Ordinary Time, A

Fear God. That is a biblical concept that is often misunderstood. It does not mean that we should be afraid of God. It means that we should respect God, reverence God, and be more concerned with fulfilling the Law of God than with the way others might respond to us.

In the Gospel reading for this Sunday Jesus says, “Fear no one.” He tells us do not let others intimidate you. He tells us to keep our priorities straight. He tells us that we should not even be afraid of people who could kill us. “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” In one of the most beautiful passages in the New Testament, Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”

The Lord also says in that passage, “Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” This is not a popular concept in our society. We emphasize God’s compassion and mercy, and this is good, but we tend to refuse to acknowledge His justice. In our own minds, we transform God into an imaginary figure that will not respond to our rejection of His life and laws. For example, a man commits adultery, leaves his wife and children, and then says, “God understands.” Well maybe the god of his imagination might understand, but the real God was present when marriage vows were exchanged

between this man and his wife. God sees the chaos the selfish man thrust upon a good wife and their beautiful children. God's mercy is always available, but if the man, or if any of us refuse to acknowledge our sins and seek forgiveness, we are committing the deadly sin of presumption, and, in effect, denigrating God to a creature of our imagination.

But if we live with a reverence and respect for the Lord, the biblical Fear of the Lord, if we do all we can to be God - fearing, then we do not have to be afraid of anything. When we live with a reverence and respect for the Lord, then all those concerns that the media delights in frightening us with will diminish. Will the corona virus destroy half the population of the world? We certainly pray that it will not, but we also know that live or die does not matter as long as we belong to the Lord. Will the world end this year? Everything else seems to be going wrong in 2020, so maybe, but probably not. The end of the world does not matter as long as we are united to God. Will World War III erupt when we least expect? Maybe, probably not. Nevertheless, it does not matter as long as we are united to God. Will people attack us for being Christian? Absolutely. In fact there are many people in certain parts of the world that are being attacked for being Christian every day. Will we be mocked because we are against abortion, against capital punishment, against euthanasia, against taking children from their parents? We certainly will be attacked for promoting the totality of respect life, but mocking does not matter as long as we are united to God.

We have nothing to fear as long as we fear the Lord. We are a lot more important to our Loving Father than a flock of sparrows; yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without our heavenly Father's concern. How much more does God value those creatures that are made in His image and likeness? We are worth infinitely more than many sparrows.

The devil has three terrible lies with which he attacks us, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly. The first of the devil's lies is: You are not good enough. To that God answers, "I have made you good enough. I became one of you. I died for you; so I could raise you up with me to eternal life." The second lie of the devil is: You are alone. God answers, "I am with you always. I know you. I know every hair on your head. I know what you are going through. Together we can conquer all challenges, all fear." The third lie of the devil is one which all liars try to convince others of, that lie is simply: the other person is lying. In the case of the devil, his third great lie is that God has misled us. He used this to great effect in the biblical story about original sin. The devil told Adam and Eve that God was misleading them to keep them from being like God. In our modern times, some people question that there might be other ways to live than that presented by the Church. To the accusation that God lies, God answers, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

Fear the Lord and do not be afraid of anything. The Lord says, "You are worth more than many sparrows." Amen.