

# Reflecting

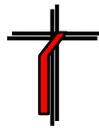
*On Sunday's Readings*

## **Fear of the Lord**

**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time – June 21, 2020**

Jer 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Mt 10:26-33

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In our first reading today we hear about Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet in Jerusalem who was trusted and respected by the king of Judah. It was at the time when the Kingdom of Judah was threatened by the Babylonians whom have swept through and conquered most of the area and now had their eyes set on Jerusalem. The king, not getting the answers he wanted from his counselors turns to Jeremiah for advice. The king saw him as someone who knew the truth and was not afraid to proclaim it. Jeremiah told the King that the Babylonians were agents of God about to punish the Jewish people for adopting pagan ways. Today's reading, tells how the King's counselors were looking for ways by which they could denounce him to the King, condemn him, even have him killed. Jeremiah is tested, his life is threatened. Should he go along with the counselors and preserve his life? Should he get out of Jerusalem with its deadly politics? Or should he stand firm, give witness to God and chance persecution from those gathered around the King? He decided to fear God rather than be afraid of men.

**Fear God.** That is a biblical concept that is often misunderstood. It does not mean that we should be afraid of God. It is reverence for the One who made us in love and who sustains us in mercy and kindness. The greatest injury or loss which we can experience is not physical but spiritual -- the loss of one's soul to the power of hell. A healthy fear of God leads to spiritual maturity, wisdom and right judgment and it frees us from the tyranny of sinful pride, cowardice -- especially in the face of evil, and spiritual deception. In today's Gospel reading Jesus says, "**Fear no one.**" He tells us to keep our priorities straight. He tells us not to be intimidated by this world, 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 ....; so do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.**"

The Lord also says in that passage, "**Be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gahanna.**" This is not a popular concept in our society. We emphasize God's compassion and mercy, and that 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 His 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 those marriage vows were made to Him and to his wife. God's mercy is always available, but if the man, or if

any of us refuse to acknowledge our sins and refuse to seek forgiveness, we are committing the deadly sin of presumption, and, in effect, demeaning 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, this COVID-19 pandemic destroy half the population of the world similar to how the Black Plague destroyed half the population of Europe? We certainly pray that it will not, but we also know that live or die what matters is that 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. This weekend is the beginning of Summer and with Summer comes the Hurricane season. Will a Hurricane devastate the West Coast of Florida destroying homes and lives? Maybe, probably not. But 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 many sections of the world that are being attacked for being Christian every day. Will we be ridiculed because we are against abortion, against capital punishment, against euthanasia, for taking a stance against racism and injustice? We certainly will be attacked for promoting the totality of respecting life, but criticism does not matter as long as we are united to God.

When my wife read this homily she commented that it was full of doom and gloom. I agree with her but we have to call it the way we see it. But, 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 who are made in His image and likeness? You and I. 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.** How many times have we belittled ourselves and commented that we 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 has abandoned you.** How many times have we felt that way, especially during these last

few months with the Coronavirus and also the violence that is sweeping across our communities and across our country. How many times have we asked “God, where are you. Have you abandoned us?” God answers, “I am with you always. I know you. I know every hair on your head. I know what you are going through. Do not be afraid. Together we can conquer all challenges, all fear. I am in control.” The third lie of the devil is one which all liars try to convince others of, that lie is simply: **God has lied to us and has deceived us.** He used this to great effect in the biblical story about original sin. The devil told Adam and Eve that God was deceiving them, lying to them to keep them from being like God. In our modern times, some people question that there might be other ways to live than those presented by the Church. To that, God answers, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

As we continue with our celebration and come forward to this table to receive him, physically or spiritually, let us asked the Lord for an awareness of the dangers that are around us and the acknowledgement that the Lord is stronger than anything that can harm us. For the wisdom to know, that we can turn to Him in times of temptation and ask for help knowing that he will always be there and never let us down. Let us ask Him for the courage and strength to resist what is wrong and do what is right. And as always, let us ask him to guide our thoughts, our feelings and our actions.

***“Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.”***

It’s that simple. During this week let us do our part to do things God’s way knowing that when we fear, when we are tempted to do wrong we can turn to God. Let us acknowledge God before others and not only help ourselves, but others too. Let us acknowledge God before others and Jesus will acknowledge us before his heavenly Father.

***The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my shepherd. I walk with no fear.***

***May God Bless each and every one of you and for all you Fathers out there, a very happy and blessed Father’s day to you.***

