

Homily for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2023 Year A

Life itself is very sweet and the world is full of many wonderful things. However for many people today the world is also a place of fear, loneliness and injustice.

The mass media brings it right into our front rooms. Day after day the icy fingers of fear just have to brush the human heart and we are left to live with the awful reality of just how fragile and vulnerable we really are.

Life brings pain.

It may come from the world of nature. Disasters like earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and disease: all these things can indifferently sweep human life away, and all of our well made plans and constructions will also be swept away. We can harness the power of nature, but time and time again the forces of nature rise up and overwhelm us, or all those close to us. We are reminded of just how fragile and vulnerable we are. We can experience real fear.

It may, on the other hand, come from the world of International politics; totalitarian governments, religious and civil wars, terrorism, blind fanaticism, all have a way of ruthlessly disregarding and denying the individual man his fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Censorship, imprisonment, torture, exile, manipulation of the truth, and even murder, the individual has become expendable and can be easily be sacrificed for the 'so called' good of the larger majority, or for the sake of the perfect economic or political philosophy. If we open up our eyes to those scenarios we can again feel real fear.

Or it may come from the world of personal relationships. Family life and values are undermined; marriages too easily disintegrate; the elderly feel insecure; the young lack hope and ambition; people hurtfully betray the love and trust others place in them . It is a mad, mad rush to promote one's own best interests and the devil take the hindmost.

Many are caught up in a terrible poverty trap and are pushed to the edges of society, where a terrible sense of despair and helplessness only drags them down even deeper. When we open our eyes to all that is happening around us, we can again experience real fear.

Our fear is not unfounded, because we know only too well how vulnerable we ourselves are, and that even if we happen to survive all the slings and arrows that life may throw at us, we still have to live with the prospect of the decline of our physical or mental health, the vulnerability of ageing, the fear of our personal dissolution in death, and what may lie beyond.

What does Christ have to say about this?

In one of the most encouraging passages in the Gospels His voice rings out with absolute clarity and authority. To all who are His He says 'Do not be afraid.'

Fear, even though it can be well founded, can totally distort human judgement and perspective. What Christ is saying is do not let this happen to you. You have nothing to fear but fear itself.

There will always be things in life that you never understand, things that are hidden from you, but behind all of these things are reasons and explanations that one day will be made clear to you.

There will sadly always be people only too ready to hurt you, abuse you, and even kill you, but they can never touch the part of you that lives forever, your spirit, your immortal soul.

The hurts of this life may flow over and around you like a river in full flood, but they can never hurt that part of you that is beyond all harm.

That part of us that is made for eternity is wrapped for a short while in the part of us that is subject to time, our human bodily existence. If time will bring with it hurts and anxieties, then it will also bring with it consolation and healing, because that is the essence of time, everything passes.

Nobody is immune from hurt and pain in this life, not even Christ Himself in his bodily existence, but for people of faith the only way to cope with the pains and heartbreak of mortality is to somehow enable ourselves to sharpen up and become more aware of the pure spirit that is inside us. The tragedy of modern man is that he is only too aware of his bodily existence and all of its demands and vulnerabilities. At the same time he has a diminished sense of the spiritual part, the part that actually feels things like fear.

But it is that spiritual part but is also the seat where feelings like love, joy, peace, hope and confidence can also be experienced. But each of us can only open ourselves up to these marvellous feelings, by increasing our awareness of the spiritual beings that we are, and then nourishing our souls that their strength grows. Then strong in spirit we can keep our perspective, cope and survive whatever life may inflict upon us.

An important question here is if do not have any awareness of your spiritual centre, or you choose to ignore and neglect it, then I don't see how you can possibly cope.

Why are we so precious in God's sight?

Are we really worth more than hundreds of sparrows?

The answer is that because we share in parts of the pure spirit that God is in Himself. Looking at us, God cannot but love the eternal part of himself that we are. We too have to grow to know and love that eternal spark that we are, and we have the power to fan it into a flame.

So Christ's words 'Do not be afraid,' are not just words of encouragement, they are a programme, a basic attitude to life.

He is saying to us, you have it within your power to develop a profound sense of who you really are, not just a physical material body, but also a spiritual soul.

That soul, your soul, is a spark of the eternal, everlastingly loved by Almighty God.

As time and all the accumulated hurts and ravages of time wear down and defeat and dissolve the body, the flame of your spirit should grow stronger and brighter, until all fear is transformed into joy, and our light becomes part of the dazzling light of Eternity.