

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on August 8, 2010
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year C

The first words of Christ in today's Gospel – “Do not be afraid” – invite the question: what are we afraid of? Here is a list of ten common fears: spiders, being overweight, public speaking, the dentist, conflict in our most common relationships, losing our job, becoming poor, failure, rejection, dying. Do you hear any of yours in this list? Some of our fears are quite personal and specific. These are some of mine: I fear for my dad's health and wellbeing. I'm not always sure I'm up to what being a pastor involves. I'm afraid of not becoming the man Christ wants me to be.

Christ says to us, “Do not be afraid. Your Father is pleased to give you the Kingdom.” What is the Kingdom? Heaven, yes – but, more specifically, life - as God intends it. Christ tells us to “sell all you have”. Sell or trade in your self-reliance for the sake of faith and hope. St. Paul tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. This assurance and realization is hope becoming tangible; the evidence of things unseen is the Kingdom of God becoming more and more present in our world.

How do we deal with our fears, in the light of faith and hope? Some – spiders, the dentist – we have to face (my mother would often say, “Just offer it up!”). Dealing with conflict in relationships involves conversation, understanding, and forgiveness. Failure becomes an opportunity for beginning again with Christ's help and the help of others. The fear of dying is offset with the hope of the Kingdom and the mercy of Christ.

Faith is a verb, the realization of things hoped for. There was a piece in the New York Times recently about Al Qaeda and the Taliban giving flood relief to the Pakistanis to influence them. So is our government, but Al Qaeda and the Taliban are there more quickly. We are called, through our faith and hope, to influence others – not for political power but for the coming of the Kingdom. Faith and hope are verbs, expressed in how we act. It is a group of parishioners going to Honduras to strengthen our connection with our sister parish, to see how our faith in action can continue to help. Catholic Relief Services is also in Pakistan to assist the one million people devastated by the floods. This is faith in action – faith as a verb – to assist people we will never meet until the Kingdom of God. But our help is the Kingdom being realized – faith in action – the evidence of things seen.

The world is filled with fear. Christ and Christ-like action dispel fear and offer hope. As we come to the Eucharist today, let us ask the Lord for the grace to face our fear and to make us people who rely on Him, enabling faith in action, which is hope touching the lives of others.