



June 25, 2023

## 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"Fear no one."*

Matthew 10:26



Dear Friends,

Throughout history people have committed atrocities because of fear of "the other." During the Great Depression fascism was raising its ugly head in many countries. Fear was destroying democracies and targeting minority populations. Jews and others were being scapegoated. The evils of fascism would envelope the whole world in war. It was in that frightening time that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke the brave words *"The only thing we need to fear is fear itself."*

Fear can be a corrosive and destructive force in life. Some twelve-step programs help people to dispel fear by getting them not to focus on fear of what might happen. How often do we worry about things that never came to pass? Or how often have we been anxious about situations over which we have no control? Fear keeps us from acting. Fear keeps us from accepting the truth. Fear leads us to blame others.

Fear seems to thrive on secrecy. In the culture of Jesus there was no sense of individual privacy. Everyone minded everyone else's business. Such an atmosphere can be oppressive. People in this environment resort to secrecy and deception to gain some breathing room from the prying eyes. The result of such a strategy is the suspicion that if you are keeping a secret, you must be up to no good. And people fear that you are planning something that will bring shame on the whole village. So, Jesus advises his followers to a policy of transparency. *"What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered proclaim on the housetops."*

Jesus realizes the toxicity of fear. After promising that the truth will in the end win out, Jesus sends his disciples to announce the Good News of the coming world. The idea of a change will threaten some, especially those who are comfortable and like things just the way they are. These are the privileged. They will act to stop the Gospel. So, Jesus tells his disciples to *"Fear no one."* He goes on to say, *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear the one who can destroy both body and soul."*

Who is the one that can destroy both body and soul? It does not make sense that Jesus is referring to God. Jesus has been preaching the God of loving-kindness and compassion. So, if it is not God who then?

In our first reading from Jeremiah, the prophet is at a low point in his ministry. His preaching has made a lot of enemies. He trusts that his suffering is a test from God, but he is also hoping God would take vengeance on his persecutors—ideally in a way he can watch and savor. While this is a very human sentiment, and we must admit that there is a large strain of this thinking in the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus leads us to a different understanding.

Jesus at his arrest warns the disciples, *"All who take the sword will perish by the sword."* As he is crucified, he forgives his executioners. He is warning us that the one who can destroy body and soul is us! Our desire for revenge is corrosive to our spiritual, psychological, and physical well-being. Hatred and revenge harm us more than our persecutors.

Real love of one's enemies disarms and nourishes all involved. This process helped heal South Africa and Chile when they established Truth and Justice Commissions after violent dictatorships. Telling the truth of injustice and forgiving perpetrators helped disarm continuing violence. As St Paul tells the Romans today, the gift of the reconciling love of Christ Jesus changes us and the world. May that love always dispel fear and instill in us the gift of peace.

Peace,

*Fr Ron*

*Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)*