

Homily Resources – Sunday June 21, 2020, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings: Jeremiah 20:10-13, Psalm 69, Romans 5:12-15, Matthew 10:26-33

1. Summary: This is the second of three Sundays on Matthew 10, the Mission of the Twelve. Jesus admonishes them three times not to fear. Fear traps us and limits us. Radical love of God frees us to every other good (reread). Particularly relevant because of the fear of COVID-19 and radical social movements which operate on fear. The love of God and of one another (in justice) is corrective.

2. Fearless St. John Chrysostom: Fidelity to God under persecution can manifest itself in many forms. A story told of St. John Chrysostom alleges that when the Emperor threatened banishment, Chrysostom responded to the threat by saying that the emperor could not do so, "because the whole world is my Father's Kingdom." "Then," replied the emperor, "I will take away your life." To which Chrysostom said, "You cannot, for my life is hid with Christ in God." Next threatened with the loss of his treasure, this saint replied, "You cannot, for my treasure is in Heaven where my heart is." The emperor made one last effort: "Then I will drive you away from here and you shall have no friend left." But again, St. John Chrysostom responded, "You cannot, for I have one Friend from whom you can never separate me. I defy you, for you can do me no harm." -- You can do me no harm! Chrysostom suffered exile three times, dying while travelling during the third. His last words, reportedly, were "Glory be to God for all things." In 414 Pope Innocent 1 recognized him as a Saint.

3. For us as disciples, three reasons not to fear and what we really need to fear.

4. First. Do not fear those who will persecute us. This was Jeremiah's situation, which he was complaining about to the Lord. Jeremiah had plenty to fear, but those threats never kept him from doing God's will. The entire passage to be considered is Jer 20:7-18. It describes Jeremiah's interior crisis as a prophet. Beyond this also read Jer 38:6.

Jeremiah's call to prophesize caused him great emotional and spiritual pain. Just before our reading:

"You duped me, O Lord, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed.
All the day long I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me.
Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message;
The word of the Lord has brought me derision and reproach all the day.
I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more.
But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it" (Jer 20:7-9).

5. Why did Jeremiah struggle so much? Because he was being persecuted and ridiculed. Was it easy for him to be "fearless"? See Jeremiah's fate in chapter 38, v. 6.

"And so they took Jeremiah and threw him into the cistern of Prince Malchiah, which was in the quarters of the guard, letting him down with ropes. There was no water in the cistern, only mud, in into the mud Jeremiah sank".

He was rescued not by an Israelite, but a Cushite, an Egyptian! After that, King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for his prophecy, but the prophecy he would not obey. But Jeremiah was fearless in telling the people and the king the truth until the day when the city fell to the Babylonians.

6. Second. Gospel. Our flesh does not want to experience persecution and its punishments. In v 28 Jesus says:

"And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and the body."

Who is that? The Evil One. When? At the Judgment we will enter eternal life or eternal death. We must be right with God.

Furthermore, Jesus says in our reading today :

"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" (vv. 32-33).

7. Third. The Assurance of God. vv 29-31. Jesus says to fear neither the world, nor the Devil, nor the flesh, because God cares about us. “Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So, let us not be afraid; we are all worth more than many sparrows.” Jesus knew that those who cured the sick, raised the dead, cleansed lepers, drove out demons would experience opposition from the **three sources of evil in the world: the world, the flesh, and the Devil.** This is why we have the three basic renunciations we make before the profession of faith in baptism, in a presentation, at confirmation and in a quinceñera involves rejecting each of these.

8. What we really must fear. We really must fear becoming separated from God. Only sin can separate us from God. We know that all mortal sins destroy our relationship with God. That is why mortal sin must be confessed to be in a right relationship with God and to be able to receive communion.

9. What should we really fear? There is a real role for real, terrifying fear in our lives. Example of Charlie, the letter carrier, in Dr. Maurice Rawlings “To Hell and Back.” While Rawlings was trying to resuscitate Charlie, Charlie was terrified because he saw he was going to go to Hell, until he prayed a prayer of commitment. “Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Keep me out of hell and if I live, I’m on the hook. I’m yours.” Then a religious conversion took place, actually two, Charlie and the Doctor.

10. Importance of knowing what sin is and how the world and the Devil operate to corrupt us. We really do not want to get crossed up against God. That is why we must know what sin is. That is why we learn the Ten Commandments, that is why we study St. Paul’s Serious Sin lists. God does not want us to sin. How many of us know in detail the **Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins and what St. Paul has told us about serious sins.** Plus, this is just a wise thing to do because all sin destroys or hurts our relationships, with God and with others. How many of us do a really good examination of conscience? We have taken and are going to take again a promise to instruct children who have been baptized in the ways of the Lord and to avoid evil and sin.

11. Today on Fathers’ Day we need to be very aware of the perversion of the values that underly good fatherhood and good family life. To be a father involves the use of our sexuality. Look at the current perversions of that good function of our body. Gay marriage, with all possible perversions now approved by our Supreme Court. A disastrous rate of divorce, even among Christians and Catholics. The eighteen girls in Gloucester, Mass, who made a pact to get pregnant during High School. Fornication and corruption. (Note - these reflections first made on this Scripture in 2017. How much worse now?).

12. Are we willing to do what we need to do to form and guide, to inspire and to protect our children and those of the household of God? I hope you can have some sympathy for me with things like this for sometimes I feel like Jeremiah. Concerning sexual sins, Mary told Jacinta on her deathbed (Spanish flu, 1918) that “more souls go to hell for the sins of the flesh than anything else.” See 1 Thess 4:3-8 and 1 Cor 6:19-20.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore, glorify God in your body” (1 Cor).

“This is the will of God, you holiness: that you refrain from (sexual) immorality, that each of you know how to acquire a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in lustful passion as do the Gentiles who do not know God; not to take advantage of or exploit a brother in this matter, for the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you before and solemnly affirmed. For God did not call us to impurity but to holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not a human being but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you (1 Thess).

13. In conclusion, since there is only one thing to fear in life, and that is sin, we really need to know what sin is and to vigorously oppose it. Let us seek holiness and be pleasing to God. Wouldn’t that be one of the best ways of supporting our fathers and our families today?

(Additional notes on St. Chrysostom: St. John Chrysostom (ca AD 347 - September 14, 407, his name means "golden mouth"), a trained orator and a presbyter in Antioch of Pisidia for 12 years. Appointed Archbishop of Antioch, he refused to live the lavish social life expected of him, reformed the clergy, and made powerful enemies among the royalty by his plain-speaking about the neglect of Christ in the poor by the rich, their pagan tendencies, and the misuse of authority in both civil and religious spheres.