

June 21, 2020

St. Augustine Cathedral

11:30 a.m.

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Father's Day)

There are several reasons why our gathering together here in our Cathedral today, actually or virtually, is so very significant.

One is because today is the first full day of Summer! Late yesterday afternoon (about 5:45 p.m.), we all experienced the Summer Solstice, which means that today is the longest day and the shortest night of the year. Even though "summertime" this year will more than likely not be very *typical*---especially with it looking like the only baseball season we will be able to enjoy will be with our own Kalamazoo Growlers--- it's still summertime, and that's always a plus.

Another reason, of course, is that today is Father's Day. So, I want to wish a very Happy Father's Day to all Dads present, all Dads watching on the livestream, and all deceased Fathers who have gone on to receive their Heavenly rewards. We all know how important Dads are in the lives of every child---no matter what age we are. It's so important for our Dads to be great role models for us in what it means to be a good, honest, and truthful person; and of course from a Faith perspective, the way that our Dads are role models for us in practicing our Faith and living according to the ways of God is critically important in helping us to have a good, clear image of Who God, Our Father in Heaven, is. May God bless all Fathers today, living and deceased.

But of course, the most important reason why our gathering together today is so memorable is because we get to experience the comforting Word of God, and the Life-giving Presence of Jesus with us in the Eucharist. Our Sunday Feasts are over, and we have returned to the Ordinary Time of the Year. Today is actually the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Interestingly enough, all today's Readings focus our attention on God's Love for us, and His Presence with us, which should result in providing us with a sense of being loved, cared about, watched over, and protected. What God wants us to know is that He is with us; He is not way up in the sky, He is not removed from us, nor is He an adversary against us. And He has gone to such great lengths to prove His Love for us by sending His Son Jesus into our world, to take on our human nature. God's Plan has always been that it would be through Jesus' suffering, death and Resurrection, that He would win for us the gift of Eternal Salvation; and on top of that, Jesus remains with us in His Church and thru the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

So there is nothing more that God could do to help us know that, ultimately, there is absolutely nothing for us to fear.

And, though just coincidental, I think that's another reason why this being Father's Day is so significant because one of the most important roles that our fathers typically have in the lives of us, their children, is to help us feel protected, secure, watched over, and that we have nothing to fear! When we're very young, our Dads patiently reassure us that there are no monsters hiding under the bed or in the closets, and that he will keep us safe; and later on, as we get older, our Dads begin to give us freedom to "test our wings", even though it makes them very worried to do so; they know that's the only way to help us find our own way.

That's what today's Scripture Readings as we return to this Ordinary Time of the Year are also doing---reassuring us that with God, there is, ultimately, nothing to fear.

We heard Jeremiah sharing that message with us in our First Reading. In his role as a Prophet of God, Jeremiah spoke Truth to the Powers of his day; and as is usually the case when someone does that, those in power turned against him, and they "*denounced*" him. Even those who had been his friends, as he said, "*were on the watch for any misstep of mine, so that they could take vengeance on me*". But his one, most important and abiding sense of security, as we heard him say, was this: "*The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion.....(and so I)...Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for He has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked.*"

And in today's Gospel passage that we just heard, Jesus' first words to His Apostles are: "*Fear no one!*" In fact, in those 7 brief verses that we heard, Jesus repeated that message to the Apostles 3 different times---"*Do not be afraid.*"

Now, that's not to say that Jesus didn't realize that there were problems to be handled, or challenges to be faced, or difficulties to be encountered, or people who would misunderstand Him and who would want to, and actually would, hurt Him---and those who followed Him; of course Jesus knew that. He knew what awaited Him down the road in Jerusalem. He knew what persecutions and even martyrdom awaited the Apostles and the other Disciples, who would set out on the mission He was entrusting to them, to go to the ends of the earth and proclaim the Good News of the Gospel. And yes, Jesus knew then, and knows now, what awaits each of us in our lifetime---the struggles that we have had to go thru, and still will have to go through, in that never-ending battle that St. Paul talked about in today's Second Reading---

the constant battle between sin and its consequence, death; and the Grace that comes from Jesus and its consequence, Eternal Life.

So of course there are things to fear, and challenges that will cause us to worry. But what Jesus wants us to know is that same basic message that Jeremiah relied upon as his bottom-line sense of confidence; that even though the whole world might be against me: “*The Lord is with me.*” God needs for us to know that same Truth as our bottom-line assurance: God is **with** us---and that’s how Jesus can say to us with such conviction: “*fear no one*”; “*do not be afraid*”.

Unfortunately, in our day and time, there are very real “fears” that we are facing; they’re more real than the monsters hiding under the bed from our childhood, or even the “testing of the boundaries” of our youth. In this year 2020, we’re still in the grip of a worldwide pandemic, and all the real, harsh, life-and-death fears that come along with this still-mysterious coronavirus. How sad it is that we have to be afraid of getting too close to one another; how unfortunate it is that we have to wear masks and gloves and these shields to protect ourselves and each other; how extremely discouraging it is that we have been kept from the very source of our spiritual strength, and that still so many of our People are unable to have easy access to the very Presence of Christ in the Eucharist because of these ongoing worries.

Over and above these pandemic-related fears, there are now throughout our country fears and divisions among us due to heightened racial strife, and a growing concern over racial equality, social justice, and a need for us as a society to find the way, and the will, to live together with basic respect for the dignity of every human person.

Those are definitely real “fears” and genuine “worries”. Jesus doesn’t ignore those realities, and He certainly doesn’t want us to ignore them either. In fact, He insists that we not ignore them; that we peacefully but directly confront those injustices; that we stand up in Christ-like Love and defend the dignity of every human being for whom Jesus suffered, died and rose from the dead to gain the right to eternal salvation. Standing up and speaking Truth to Power, as Jeremiah did; preaching the Gospel of Jesus in season and out of season, despite what personal consequences might result, as St. Paul did; and pouring Oneself out for the salvation of every person to ever live---saint or scoundrel---as Jesus did---that’s what we, as People of Faith, are called to do as well.

And as we do so, Jesus tells us “*Fear no one*”----“*Do not be afraid*”. Jesus says very clearly: “*Do not (even) be afraid of those who kill the body.*” But immediately, Jesus adds this one very

important qualifier: *“be afraid only of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna”*. In other words, be afraid only of the *Evil One* who will do everything he can to deceive us, and convince us to turn away from God.

Yes, the world in which we live in 2020 is a world that’s filled with lots of things to fear. But, we can’t forget what Jesus tells us: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid---you are worth more than many sparrows.”* Since the God of all the Universe loves each of us so much that He knows the number of hairs on our head, He also certainly knows all our fears; and even more than that, He knows all our sins---and still loves us. All our sins can be forgiven, and all our fears can be transformed by God’s unconditional Love for us, and His abiding Presence with us.

Today, on this first day of summer, the day when the daylight lasts the longest, let us allow the Light of Christ and His Love for us to guide us out of the darkness of all our fears. And on this Father’s Day, let us open our ears to hear God our Father say to each of us: *I know you---I know the number of hairs on your head---I know the fears in your heart---and I love you. Stay close to Me. Do not be afraid; Fear no one; I am with you, all the days of your life, and for all eternity.*

God bless you, now and always!