

TWELTH SUNDAY OT - A

"Fear no one."

These words of Jesus to his disciples remind me of another address given by a great leader the year after my Father was born.

In 1933 President Franklin Roosevelt told a suffering nation: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

I think we need to hear those words once again in our own time, especially in the midst of the current health crisis.

Yes, there is the healthy "fear" of catching a deadly virus, and so we do those things which are meant to protect ourselves and others.

But this is not really "fear," this is "prudence."

The "fear" that we need to fear was described in one of the commentaries I read:

"[It] has to do with a sense that everything is out of control ... and with a rejection of the understanding that God is in control, even in the midst of [every] horror and misery, and that each personal life matters to God."

The commentator continued: "We need to reclaim the biblical notion that our God is a living God, who has called us into existence and knows us by name."

Trust in God casts out all fear.

Even the famously persecuted prophet Jeremiah could declare: "The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion."

When a child is afraid, he or she usually runs to a parent who offers a sense of security in the face of the unknown.

Today we honor those men who are called to provide their children with such comfort and reassurance.

Even Jesus, the Son of God, needed such a presence during his young earthly life and so his heavenly Father gave him St. Joseph to be his protector and guide.

St. Joseph is a model for all fathers in his obedience to God's will, his humility, and his ardent love for Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

According to tradition, St. Joseph died before Jesus left home to begin his public ministry.

This Father's Day will be different for my brothers and me; as you know, our Dad died last year on June 23rd.

But I take great comfort in knowing that my Dad was a man of deep faith who longed to be with the Lord - and my Mom - in the Father's house of heaven.

To return to today's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples, "Fear no one," and "Do not be afraid."

In the verses of St. Matthew's Gospel which immediately precede those we just heard, Jesus spelled out the challenges they would - and we - would face:

"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves."

He proceeds to say that his disciples will be hated, persecuted, arrested, and even put to death.

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And yet, Jesus tells them: "Do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

Of course, no one wants to die, but we can face death - and the thousands of little "deaths" we encounter between here and the grave - with the trust that "all the hairs on our head are counted" by our loving God.

Jesus assures us that, if our heavenly Father notices the death of the most common of birds, how much more are his watchful eyes ever upon his dear children for whom he gave his only Son.

This truth is theologically expanded upon by St. Paul.

Death may have entered the world because of the sin of Adam (and Eve), but that was not the end of the story.

"For if by the transgression of the one many died, how much more did the grace of the God and the gracious [self] gift of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow for the many."

All of history, every bird that falls, and every breath we draw is held in the perfect knowledge of God our Father ...

.... And as we hear St. Paul assure us later this summer: "All things work for the good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

So let us fear no one and nothing ... neither persecution nor pestilence.

As the Bible school song confidently describes our heavenly Father: "He's got the whole world in his hands."