

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus said to his disciples, "Have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."

REFLECTION 1: **'DO NOT BE AFRAID'**

In the Gospel today Jesus calls for witnesses, that is people you are not afraid to be seen to be followers of his in the midst of a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. Fear is one of the things that keeps Christians from a bold and generous witnessing to the Gospel. Three times Jesus said to the apostles, 'Do not be afraid'.

Fortunately, there are always those in the Church who by the grace of God are able to overcome fear and witness to the gospel in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Oscar Romero is an outstanding example. When he was made Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977 he was a conservative. But he soon changed when he saw what was happening. He made public the unspeakable crimes being perpetrated by agents of the government. He was under constant threat of death - some of his best friends were murdered and still he would not be silenced. "I will stay with my people" he said. He was shot dead in March 1980 while saying mass. His enemies dealt in fear but he was not afraid of them, they might be able to kill his body but they could never destroy his soul.

Early in Matthew's Gospel, we hear Jesus say, "Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you, falsely because of me. Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven" (Matt. 5:11). There are those in every community who suffer from hateful stares that stab like daggers. The judgmental whispers behind closed doors - unkind words, false accusations and the like - and they ask, "Is this the price we pay to get to heaven?"

Jesus was no stranger to people watching and waiting for him to make a mistake - sitting in wait, ready to tear him down and put him to shame; the Pharisees and Sadducees were constantly plotting against him. They tried to twist his words and trap him into blasphemous speech. They tried to 'put him in his place'. Jesus knew that with his death, the battle would be one and when he died on the cross he overcame evil once and for all.

If any of us is experiencing a harsh world out there, where we feel down and health problems only had to our misery. Then let us recall that no matter what pain or hurt we may be going through, there is a merciful God there to comfort us, especially through our Sunday masses and daily prayers. Talk to him, we have a common language, boundless comforting and forgiveness. There is no need to be afraid; we are 'worth more than hundreds of sparrows'.