

A Homily for the 12th Sunday of the Year, 21st June 2020
from Fr Allan

It seems to me that two words that could apply to important themes running through today's scripture readings are 'Fear' and 'Terror'.

The first reading is from the book of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah is one of the major prophets. He has an important book named after him and what he says resounds throughout Hebrew Scriptures. Writing about 650 years before the Christian Era and after the Babylonian captivity he speaks God's word in a way that has become 'his own'! He has become known as a 'prophet of doom'. What he says must be true because it is so unpopular. He speaks words that the people do not want to hear. He warns people of the terror to come and even says that the people should surrender to their enemies. His friends have abandoned him. Walking in the Lord's way will not be easy.

And yet, so Jeremiah says, "The Lord is at my side, a mighty hero".

In a similar vein the Psalm says, "It is for you that I suffer taunts, that shame covers my face". However, it too reassures us that, "the Lord listens to the needy".

This week even the second reading (this week from St Paul's letter to the Romans) speaks about the sin and death that have entered the world. There's nothing to celebrate here. The celebration comes because of the divine grace - a pure gift - that Jesus Christ has brought.

The Gospel from St Matthew begins with Jesus telling his disciples not to be afraid, all will be made clear. They must know that God knows them and cares for them.

So, some terror and a certain amount of fear. I think fear characterises and even dominates a lot of life today. You may have heard it said that fear has infiltrated politics. We now have "Politics of Fear". We are encouraged to vote for a particular party or politician because if we don't then this will happen or that will happen. And these will be detrimental for us and our lives in the future. One party will increase our taxes, the other will cause a collapse in the economy, that party will take away our borders so that we will be overrun by immigrants who will take away our jobs and housing. Our fears are being played upon. Sometimes there is good reason behind this and at other times there is not.

At this particular time we fear for our health. The current pandemic is causing a lot of worry and anxiety. We have fears over our job security, our food and shelter, our personal safety. We fear attack from other nations. We even fear other religions. And so the list goes on.

Sometimes our fears go right to the heart of our inner being. We might feel lost, forgotten, intimidated and invisible. No one seems to understand what we are going through. Perhaps these fears are the worst. We become worthless.

What keeps Jeremiah sane in his trials is that he refuses to be bullied. He is absolutely convinced that God is on his side. God really does care for him. (He also hopes that God will batter his enemies!)

Jesus also will not be intimidated. (The passion narrative that we read from St John's Gospel on Good Friday is a great example of this). He admits that his followers will be threatened.

He doesn't deny this but he tells them not to give in. Fear is natural but how can we, disciples, overcome the fears that we will meet in life?

Well, today Jesus argues that the Father really does care very deeply for the true disciple. He takes the example of a sparrow as an example. Sparrows were regarded as almost worthless. They were sold in the market as food for the poor. They were sold in batches and those that poor people didn't eat were thrown out. Jesus tells the disciples that his Father even has a care for those that are thrown away. How much more will he care for us?

If we believe, deep down that we are worthless then we will give in to any kind of intimidation. There's no point in defending anything. If we know that we are worth something then we will stand up for what we believe in - for our values. We will be able to overcome all of the fear that our enemies try to instil in us. Our sense of real worth can help us overcome our real fear. God our Father offers us his everlasting love. When we try to keep this at the forefront of our minds all kinds of attack, ridicule, threat and hostility will simply pale into insignificance.