

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time - A

Fear is a very powerful emotion, isn't it? Probably one of the most powerful of the emotions. Strangely enough, horror movies apparently are one of the few consistently sure-few hits at the box office these days. And the ones that are coming out seem to be very unsettling to say the least. Needless to say, I am not a fan of this particular genre. Real life has enough challenges; I don't need to add to it by going to see a movie. I'll take comedy any time over horror.

Fear makes us think irrational thoughts and it makes us do irrational things. And unfortunately, it is often a big part of our lives. Think about all the things that you are afraid of, or that cause you stress or anxiety. The news of course is a constant drumbeat of things to be worried or anxious about – I don't think I need to give you any examples of this. A steady diet of the news

constantly keeps us on edge. However, there is another way to live, which I will come back to.

But first, I want to look at our first reading from Jeremiah, and a particular kind of fear that he experienced. Jeremiah was born about 650 B.C. and was sent by God as a prophet to the people of Jerusalem, to warn them of impending doom. The people of Jerusalem had turned away from God to follow false gods; they neglected the poor and the abandoned in their midst and were consumed with worldly things. Jeremiah prophesied to them of the disaster that would befall them if they did not change their ways and return to the Lord: they would be invaded, the city destroyed, the people scattered and taken into exile, and so on. He was trying to rouse them from their stupor; in this case, he sought to spark the consciences of the people by *making* them afraid – because in this case they did have legitimate reason to fear. Not surprisingly, he was not very popular. In fact, he says that

everyone wanted to take vengeance on him. I think most people would rather be complimented than challenged. And so, Jeremiah was afraid for his own life, and cried out to the Lord. But in this reading, he acknowledges that he actually has no reason to fear his enemies, because he has the Lord on his side.

Like Jeremiah, sometimes it is not easy to live out our faith, or to proclaim this faith, especially in the midst of a society that rejects it and is hostile to it. Being Catholic and believing what the Church teaches, because we believe that the Church was founded by Christ and is guided by the Holy Spirit, is not going to make us popular. In fact, it might even earn us some enemies. Or, perhaps more often, people will have misunderstandings and prejudices about what we believe and might just keep away from us or subtly treat us differently. Of course, not everyone will do this, thankfully – there are a lot of people out there who are trying to live good lives. But there *are* going to be aspects of what we believe that

sometimes will be rejected, and then, by extension, we will be rejected as well. This has happened throughout history. It is nothing new.

So what should our response be to this? Do we live in fear? No, like Jeremiah, we must remind ourselves that, if we are faithful to the Lord, if we cling to him and hold fast to what he teaches, we have no reason to fear. Jesus says, “Fear no one. 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 body in Gehenna.” Jesus is saying that the death of our physical bodies is not the worst thing that can happen to us. Nor is persecution or losing the respect of others, losing a job, and so on. Because God will always take care of us, He will ultimately bring good out of evil. We will ultimately be victorious if we remain faithful to Him. So hold fast to your faith and do not be afraid. Rather, pay attention to the state of your soul, because what matters most are not the passing

things of this world. All of this is going to pass away eventually, even these bodies we possess now. But our souls will remain; they will last through death and for all eternity. So what matters is our eternal salvation.

But even then, we do not necessarily have to be afraid. If we listen to the Lord and persevere in following him as best we can, and seek forgiveness for the times when we fail, then we can trust in his mercy. It's only if we do not pay attention to the Lord, who speaks to us through the Church and through our own consciences, that we *should* be uncomfortable, or perhaps even afraid. We ought to listen to some of those modern-day Jeremiahs who call the world to a change of life and conversion of heart. Because that is what is necessary to lead us to conversion.

But it seems that we live in a culture of fear: what about all the bad news we constantly get from the media? It almost seems

like just about anything can happen. And every year it seems that our society grows increasingly antagonistic to what we believe.

How are we supposed to not live in fear? A few suggestions: less time with the news and social media. Their purpose seems to be to agitate rather than inform. Bad news gets more clicks which yields more revenue. Another thing we can do is to help someone who might be suffering or worse off than you, and try to bring a little joy to that person's life. Find someone who is lonely and visit that person. It is amazing how focusing on the needs of others can take our mind off the things that trouble us or make us afraid. Also, doing this resists the tendency towards isolation, towards creating barriers, towards fear of the other. The devil wants us to be isolated. He wants us to be afraid, because then we become more vulnerable to him.

Finally, let us turn towards God, and renew our trust in Him, in his providence, his mercy, and his love for us. God knows every

hair of our head: he knows us intimately; He's not some distant, uncaring deity. He gave up His only begotten Son for us for our salvation. He's not trying to trick us or trap us into making a mistake: He desires our salvation! Anytime you feel afraid, turn to your Father in heaven who loves you more than you can imagine, and renew your trust in Him.

- **June 21, 2026 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**