

June 25, 2023
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:26-33

Jesus said to the Twelve: “Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

And 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. 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. Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.

Background:

The Gospel text from last Sunday (Matthew 9:36-10:8) described how Jesus was moved at the sight of the crowds who were abandoned like sheep without a shepherd. Then he called his disciples and commissioned twelve of them to be apostles, sending them out with authority to proclaim the kingdom of God to the lost sheep of Israel.

In the Gospel text that follows that reading, Matthew then continues to describe Jesus' instruction as to how the apostles are to travel. Jesus acknowledges the danger involved in being sent out to the towns and villages, and he asks that they rely on the Jewish code of hospitality for strangers. He directs them not to take money or provisions for themselves, and to stay at only one person's house for the duration of their visit to a town (Matt 10:9-15). Jesus also tells them to be prepared for rejection and persecution; but even if they are rejected by others, God will still be with them. He concludes by saying that a slave is not greater than the master, implying that if He who is their master has endured rejection and harsh treatment when he was sent by his Father to be with them, they should at least be open to similar mistreatment (Matt 10:16-25).

If time permits, it would be beneficial to read the first twenty-five verses of the tenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel in preparation for your reflection on the Gospel for this Sunday.

The Gospel for this Sunday continues with Jesus' further instruction to the apostles, where he asks them not to be afraid. The direct exhortation to “fear no one” may suggest that, for the faith-filled disciple, fear should be nonexistent. However, Jesus seems to acknowledge the fear the disciples may experience as they face the difficulties they will encounter. Jesus does not suggest that they should not be afraid; rather he tells them they should be afraid of God who has the ability to bring upon them much greater pain: the physical, eternal pain of life without God. That would be worse than any physical suffering they might have to endure on their mission.

Jesus then uses two images to reassure the disciples of God's intimate concern for each of them. God's awareness of each of the numerous sparrows and countless hairs is a reminder to the disciples that even though they may feel abandoned or forgotten by God in difficult times, this is not so. God is acutely aware of each of them, and the hairs of one's head are beyond being counted, yet God knows each of these. Therefore, it would be a serious mistake to give in to one's doubts and turn from God.

Reflection Questions:

1. What have been some of the fears you have experienced, now or in the past?
2. What affect has fear had on you and how you live your life?
3. Can you recall places in the Scriptures where God responds to the fears of the people or those he has chosen to be his servants?
4. Are you familiar with psalms that speak of fear?
5. Can you imagine a God who knows every hair on your head?

6. How do you feel about God who knows you so well that God knows every hair of your head?
7. Are there other images from the bible or other places that speak to you of God's closeness to you?
8. What is it that is so important to God, that God would ask you to face the possibility of your deepest fears?
9. Can you take some time now to talk with God about your fears, or how you hear God asking you to address those fears?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to fr.paul.gallagher.ofm@gmail.com.

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the Readings for June 25, 2023, the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah said: "I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Let us denounce him!'
All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine.
'Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him.'
But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph.
In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion.
O Lord of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart,
let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause.
Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!"

Lord, in your great love, answer me.
For your sake I bear insult, and shame covers my face.
I have become an outcast to my brothers, a stranger to my children,
Because zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who blaspheme you fall upon me.
I pray to you, O Lord, for the time of your favor!
In your great kindness answer me with your help; in your great mercy turn toward me.
"See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, may your hearts revive!
For the Lord hears the poor, and his own who are in bonds he spurns not.
Let the heavens and the earth praise him, the seas and whatever moves in them!"

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death,
and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned.
Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin
after the pattern of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come.

But the gift is not like the transgression.
For if by the transgression of the one the many died,
how much more did the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many.

Jesus said to the Twelve: "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.
What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light;
what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.
And 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.
Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one 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.
Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father.
But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father."

Excerpts from Jeremiah 20:10-13; Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for June 25th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. In the Gospel from Matthew, Jesus is preparing the Twelve to be sent on mission and he instructs them to have courage under persecution. "Speak in the light; proclaim on the housetops," he says. "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. Whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father." The other readings also have references to God's people being watched over in spite of insult and persecution and transgression. In the first reading, Jeremiah says, "The Lord is with me; my persecutors will stumble." Psalm 69 implores, "Lord, in your great love, answer me. For your sake I bear insult." In the second reading, from the letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "Death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned. How much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." The following additional quotes about how God values the lowly are in order from today's four readings: "The Lord has rescued the life of the poor." "You lowly ones, be glad; the Lord hears the poor. His own who are in bonds he spurns not." "The gift is not like the transgression." "Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."