

Our Lady of the Airways Parish

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

“The Lord is the strength of his people, a saving refuge for the one he has anointed” (Entrance Antiphon).

In 1819, the whaleship *Essex* was struck by a sperm whale and began to flood. The crew of the ship were forced into small boats with little food or water. They had three options: go to the nearest land believed to be populated by cannibals; sail to Hawaii and try to escape the seasonal tropical storms; or attempt to catch a current to take them 1500 miles to the coast of South America and risk running out of supplies on the way. The crew chose the last option, since the terrifying images from options one and two had caused them great distress and fear. Their choice unfortunately had catastrophic consequences: the men ran out of food after two months at sea, and less than half of the original crewmembers survived the ordeal. This real story, which inspired Herman Melville to write his famous novel, *Moby Dick*, captures the unpleasant emotion we call “fear”.

Fear is a natural dimension of life. As little children, many of us undoubtedly had some kind of fear. As we grew older, however, our fears either subsided, disappeared, or proved to be imaginary ones. Some of us have fear that are based on reality (e.g., certain phobias like fear of fire, or fear of heights). We are often able to overcome them through hard work, determination, and help from God. There also exists within our Western culture today a climate of fear, one that has many people feeling extremely anxious and afraid. This profound anguish, born out of a sense of emptiness, is often due to the absence of God - with the reality of God either denied, rejected, or forcefully jettisoned from one’s consciousness.

These different kinds of human fear are not the only ones that we can experience in our lives. There is another kind! In today’s gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, *“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.”* In essence, Jesus clearly distinguishes between human fear and the “fear of God”, or the “fear of the Lord”. Scripture tells us that the “fear of God” is the “beginning of knowledge.” Our Faith teaches that the fear of the Lord is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand what the “fear of God” actually is. Too often this gift is misunderstood due to the word “fear”. Many people erroneously associate it with servile fear; that is, a fear that impels a person to serve God out of fear of punishment, whether of the temporal or eternal kind. The fear of the Lord, however, is more like a filial or reverential fear; the kind of fear that causes a person to seek and do God’s will, and to avoid sin for the love of God.

This gift of the “fear of God” enables a person to remain detached from created things and to have a profound reverence for the majesty of God. One who fears the Lord recognizes his dependency on God. Those who live with “fear of God” are not afraid, since they have faith in God and acknowledge His authority over life and death. On the other hand, those who live without the “fear of God” usually usurp the place of God by making themselves as lord of good and evil, life and death.

Those who live with the “fear of God” see God as a loving Father full of mercy, goodness, solicitude and providential care. Jesus makes this very clear when He says, “*And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sorrows.*” Thus, those who fear the Lord can always remain tranquil even in the midst of trials and tribulations, since they will always find themselves in His loving, protective embrace. The greater one grows in this intimacy with God, imbued with love, the more easily one can overcome any form of fear.

Those who seek to do the will of God will always experience the painful realities of being reviled, persecuted, and in some cases, martyred. We see this clearly in today’s first reading from Jeremiah. The prophet, who was chosen by God to summon the people of his time to repent and change their lives, tells us how threatened his life is when he says, “*I hear many whispering: Terror is all around!All my close friends are watching for me to stumble.*” We can be tempted to think that what Jeremiah experienced are things of the past. This mistaken perception, however, is far from the truth. Many Christians continue to suffer persecution and even martyrdom today, especially in places where the Church is openly, violently being persecuted.

Jesus repeats several times the exhortation to have no fear. Jesus reassures us, as He reassured the Apostles, not to be afraid since “*I am with you*” (Acts 18: 9). We are called to always be ready to acknowledge and profess our faith. The Catechism offers us a sobering reflection on the reality of persecution and how we have to give witness even in the face of it. It writes: “*The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: ‘All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks.’* ***Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation:*** ‘*So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven*’” (1816).

Our task then is very clear! We should never be afraid of those who may persecute us, inflict bodily or other form of harm upon us, or even kill us. Instead of being afraid of what they might do to us, we need to be full of courage, always ready to testify for the Gospel, even to the point of death, because our very soul depends on it!

On this Father’s Day, I would like to offer my blessing to all the fathers of our parish. Please be assured that all fathers, including the deceased fathers of our parishioners (including my own), will be especially be remembered at all of our Masses this Sunday.

Happy Father’s Day!

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rev. Fr. Thomas Lim". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "T" and "L".

Fr. Thomas Lim