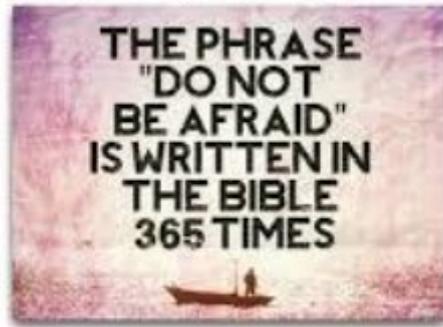


12th Sunday in Ordinary Time



"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; ..."

Dear friends,

In the gospel for this Sunday (Matthew 10:26-33), Jesus tells his disciples: 'Do not be afraid!' In fact he uses this phrase three times. The Bible uses this phrase 365 times. I think all of us want to make our own decisions in our own good time, in our own way, without being intimidated by a stronger person or group, but it depends upon what gives our lives meaning and direction.

In the 4 B.C. King Phillip of Macedon had conquered the whole of Greece, except one city-state: Sparta. Phillip sent this message to the Spartans: "You must submit without delay. *If*, I bring my army into your land, I will destroy everything." The Spartans sent back to Phillip a one-word reply: "*If*." Phillip never attacked Sparta. The Spartans picked up on the tentative use of the word 'if' as Phillip's fear of them.

Jesus in today's gospel is trying to re-assure the fear of the disciples against the fear of those who would persecute them, and try to kill them says: 'Do not be afraid, of those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul.' We all have fears, and some fear is quite healthy as it protects us from dangers, but there is an unhealthy fear that can undermine our whole belief system, self-confidence and meaning in our lives.

In the first reading today from the book of Jeremiah (20:10-13), the prophet Jeremiah feels himself being attacked by his enemies as they await his downfall. Jeremiah articulates his fear, but then he places his life in the hands of God saying: 'But the Lord is at my side, a mighty hero...sing to the Lord for he has delivered the soul of the needy from the hands of sinful people.' We feel a strong connection with Jeremiah's fear, but we also acknowledge that for us as Christians we are called to place our trust in God. Jesus, says as much to the apostles as they learn from the Son of God as to how they must face their fears, especially in the face of persecution and death.

In 2017, Pope Francis appointed Bishop Peter Zhumin as a bishop in the underground Chinese Church. (There is an official Catholic Church approved of by the Communist regime, but the underground Church in China is loyal to the Holy Father in Rome). Shortly after his appointment, Bishop Peter was arrested and imprisoned, and no-one has seen him since. While we think of Christians enjoying the freedom to practice their faith in 2020, there are still a number of countries where they are persecuted for their faith.

In Australia, while we can freely practice our faith, there is a decline in adherence to people associating themselves within any organised religion. This dilemma presents both parties with confronting the decisions they have made in terms of belief or non-belief. For Christians the challenge is to remain faithful to the message of Jesus in the face of declining numbers and criticism from the secular world as to the relevance of religion in society.

However, a society which has no religious foundation may find itself struggling to find meaning and fulfilment as it has no moral compass, and simply does what feels right, and as long as what it does, doesn't hurt anyone. The focus, changes from emphasising the importance of the soul (spirit) to focussing on the body and materialism, which can lead to a shallowness in relationships, and real harm being done to others because there is no real respect for the dignity and worth of another human being.

Christians are not perfect, and at times in our Church's history we have struggled to witness to the divine presence. Too often our our flawed and clumsy attempts at being a Church were about being afraid, when we should have acted with faith and courage. While acknowledging our failures and trying to correct and heal those painful actions, we should also remember those people who did 'shine' a light in our church, and those who remained totally faithful to the message of the gospel. The message of today's gospel is clear: 'what I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the house-tops.' We, are called to not be afraid, and to let the light of our faith shine out, so that others may give praise and thanks to God.

[Fr Kelvin](#)