

June 25, 2017
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:26-33



[Jesus said to the Twelve:] 26 "Fear no one. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. 27 What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

28 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. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. 30 Even all the hairs of your head are counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 32 Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. 33 But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.

Background

Within Matthew's gospel there are five major discourses. One of these deals with the mission of Jesus and the disciples. (Matt 10:1-42) The first eight verses of that first discourse would have normally been read last week. However, because we celebrated the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ, the readings for that feast were used instead. Those eight verses deal with the naming and sending of the twelve. Matthew continues with Jesus telling the disciples how they are to travel. While acknowledging the danger involved in being sent to the towns and villages, he asks them to rely on the Jewish code of hospitality for strangers. Therefore, they are not to take money or provisions for themselves, and they are to stay at only one person's house for the duration of their visit in any particular town. (Matt 10:9-15) Also they need to be prepared for rejection and persecution. Jesus assures them that even if others reject them, God will still be with them. He concludes by saying that a slave is not greater than the master. This seems to imply that if He, their master, has been sent out by His Father and faced rejection and harsh treatment, they should expect the same mission and possible mistreatment. (Matt 10:16-25)

This leads into our text for this Sunday, where Jesus instructs them not to be afraid. The direct exhortation to fear no one may suggest that, for the faith-filled disciple, fear should be non-existent. However, in verse 28 Jesus seems to acknowledge the fear the disciples might have as they face the difficulties of proclaiming what they have been taught. Jesus does not suggest that they should not be afraid of anything. Rather, he tells them that their real fear should be of God, who has the ability to bring upon them much greater pain than physical pain--the eternal pain of life without God. That would be worse than any physical suffering they might have to endure.

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. 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. When in your life have you experienced fear? How did that affect your relationship with God?
2. Do you ever whisper when you talk with friends? Can you remember a time when you shouted so that the whole world could hear you? What was the source of both types of experiences?

3. What has your relationship with God taught you about God that you would like to proclaim from the housetops?
4. Can you imagine a God who knows every hair on your head? What image would you use to express God's closeness or awareness of you?
5. Do you have aspects about your private life that you deliberately do not speak about to anyone?
6. Can you talk openly with God about those areas of your life?
7. Can you take time now to talk to God openly about the things that you fear most?

<http://il-ritiro.org/gospel-reflections.aspx>

The reflection and questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM.
They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel.



In the upper picture we see Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. In the centre left of the photo we also see a green space with an almond shape.

In the 1st century this was "Gehenna". Not equated with our typical understanding of hell, but in fact closer to Massabielle in Lourdes, France. Both were in their time local "garbage dumps" where refuse was burned and smouldered.

Today, Gehenna is a park hosting concerts and other public events, outside the old walls of Jerusalem. (lower picture).

Photos: Bro Alan, Israel 2012