

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Romans 5:12-15 and Matthew 10:26-33

Fear: In March, when we began to shelter in place, handgun sales increased 85% over the same period last year. The tremendous uncertainty of the situation evoked fear in us. Wasn't it rational to seek protection? Now we find, however, that handgun owners are nine times more likely to die by suicide than non-gun owners" (Bethany Ao, [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#)). Alas! Violence is not the best protection against violence! Alas! Fear, when allowed to determine our decisions, so inevitably marches us to a place of despair!

Fear: Before children are sexually abused, a grooming process occurs in which the abuser builds trust, isolates the victim and gets the victim involved in some rule breaking. After the abuse, the abuser convinces the victim not to tell anyone, because the victim is guilty too. Fear traps and prolongs.

Fear: When we feel pain or sorrow, it may overwhelm us. So we just do not feel it. We tell ourselves it is shameful to cry. We keep busy, binge or look away from injustice. Fear prevents fullness of life.

In chapter 10 of Matthew, when Jesus prepares the apostles to begin a mission of healing and preaching, he includes this week's passage about the fears his disciples might be having. "Fear no one," he reassures them. All secrets will be revealed – all the hidden wickedness, yes, and also all the love and giftedness we are afraid to share. But nothing is hidden in God's reign. Next, Jesus points out that his work is just the beginning of the worldwide reach of this reign. He is but one person, so his preaching is a whisper compared to the volume countless disciples can have. This project of embodying God's love in the world ought to be the main concern of Christians, not protecting our lives from criticism or violence. Jesus reminds his disciples that God flies and falls with the sparrows; God counts the hairs on our heads. God's tender attention is on each one of us. If we know this, then we can keep ourselves focused on being true to Jesus. Mother Teresa wrote similarly:

*People are often unreasonable, irrational, and self-centered. Forgive them anyway.*

*If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives. Be kind anyway...*

*If you are honest and sincere, people may deceive you. Be honest and sincere anyway.*

*What you spend years creating, others could destroy overnight. Create anyway.*

*If you find serenity and happiness, some may be jealous. Be happy anyway...*

*Give the best you have, and it will never be enough. Give your best anyway.*

*In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.*

The writer of Matthew lived on the brink of the possibility of change, just as we do today. Forty years after Jesus' resurrection, Christians were still part of Judaism, but many people could not broaden their thinking enough for the Christian concept that God's love encompasses the whole world. They feared what would happen if they alone were not God's chosen ones. The gospel writer called his/her audience to shake off that fear and go out with a message from the housetops: God loves everyone and so do we! Today, we are likewise called to re-create our society so that all are included and valued.

Romans 5 is also about shaking off the fear that holds us back. Picture the sin and death Paul talks about as starting with capital letters, as though they were evil super villains. Sin and Death have had power over us for far too long, Paul says. We have let the fear of Sin and Death trap us in despair, violence and racism. But Paul holds before us this truth: "How much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one human being, Jesus Christ, overflow for the many!" Jesus is the grace of God in human form, letting us know we need not fear. Let us not deny Jesus, but rather embrace the love God has for us and let it deflate the power of Sin and Death in our lives. Let us go into our day today without fear. Let us face suffering, the pandemic, poverty and racism boldly with the love of God.

- ❖ Make a list of your fears. Reflect on how they keep you from living like Jesus.
- ❖ Ask God to make you more aware of the overflowing of grace in your life. During prayer, discuss with God where it abounds for you.