

For Sunday, June 25, 2017

Moving Beyond Fear

12th Sunday Ordinary Time
<http://usccb.org/bible/readings/062517.cfm>

Jeremiah 20:10-13

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

We live in unsettled times. Issues are brewing across the globe, whether in North Korea, Russia, with ISIS, or in our very own country. Conflicts and divisions seem to be deepening every day and the news headlines constantly reveal more. We hesitate to have our children play outside alone, we fear being vulnerable in public places, and things we normally could trust are being called into question. Fear is an emotion not only becoming more common, but becoming justifiable in light of our current situation.

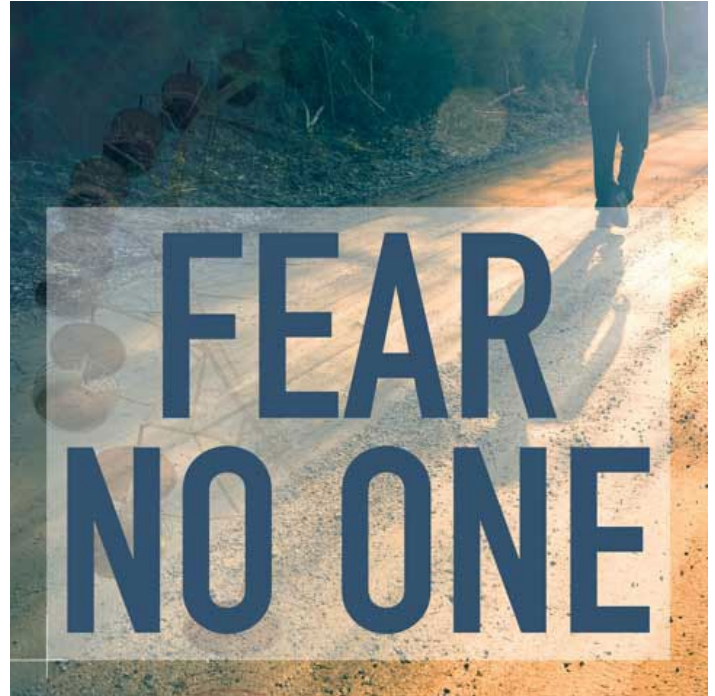
But we are people of faith and Jesus clearly makes the point that fear has no place in the life of the disciple.

Matthew's Gospel specifically tells us: "Fear no one." Even the Stoic philosopher, [Seneca](#), had no tolerance for fear: "If we let things terrify us, life will not be worth living." That being said, there is a difference between actual fear and imagined, crippling fear. Fear in the presence of a specific threat can propel us to action. For the Christian, however, that action must be a faith response. Imagined, crippling fear can prevent us from discovering and enjoying life's beauty and developing our true potential.

This is the place where our readings bring us this week. As people of faith, we are called to trust that we are being led by God and that God's presence is with us. Jeremiah the prophet understood this, as did Jesus. God values us and even the hairs on our head are counted. In the end, if we believe in God's promise then nothing can ever really happen to us. We cannot be destroyed. Our world is a challenging place to live. Life can be unstable and innocent people are hurt every day. In response, we can develop a fear of our world so great that it prevents us from actually living. As children of God and followers of Jesus, we need to consider the strength of our faith.

What do you really fear? Naming our fears helps to release their power over us. Imagined, crippling fear can be more detrimental to us than encountering what we actually fear. To live life with anxiety and worry robs us of the experience of joy God so desperately desires us to have. What happens when we can realize God's abiding and ever enduring presence? When we know God is near, we feel safe and free to reach out in love. Feeling safe and feeling fearful are incompatible. It is always either-or. Both cannot coexist. One always wins out in the end.

At first glance, living without fear may seem idealistic and unrealistic. But when you get right down to it, isn't this the way many of our stronger saints lived their lives? St. Francis of Assisi did not allow fear to prevent him from seeing the pope and renouncing the materialistic world of his father, St. Teresa of Calcutta did not



allow fear to keep her from ministering to the poorest of the poor or being poor herself. Fear did not persuade countless martyrs from facing incredible deaths, and fear certainly had no power over Jesus as he faced the cross. The same presence of God that gave courage to thousands of people over the centuries to do awesome, unimagined things is available to us as well. Why do we doubt that God can do for us what he did for them?

Many people living today have encountered some of the things we fear the most ... loss of loved ones, victimization, physical disabilities and challenges, injustice, change, poverty, devastation, and many other things. In spite of it all, they survived and survived well. They did not allow their fears to prevent them from overcoming the unimaginable and rising to a place where they can experience joy again. Whether they can name it as such, this is God's presence creating and recreating within them, bringing darkness to light just as he has from the beginning of time. We are worth much more than sparrows and God takes care of them. How much more will he take care of you?

Our world can be a scary place. When confronted with actual fear in the presence of a real threat, we are called to action. As disciples, that action can never be retaliation, revenge, vengeance, or violence, even though that seems at first to be justified. For the disciple, the action is always a response of love. The ability to respond with love in the face of real danger and threat is grounded in the teachings of Jesus. The support of his abiding presence is experienced most profoundly in the Eucharist. We need one another and we need to be reminded of who we are. More importantly, we need to be sacramentally nourished and fed in order to find the faith and resolve to live the challenging and countercultural life of the Gospel.

Rev. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

Do not look forward to the changes and chances of this life with fear.
Rather, look to them with full confidence that, as they arise,
God to whom you belong will in his love enable you to profit by them.
He has guided you thus far in life.
Do you but hold fast to His dear hand,
and He will lead you safely through all trials.
Whenever you cannot stand, He will carry you lovingly in his arms.

Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow.
The same Eternal Father who takes care of you today
will take care of you tomorrow, and every day of your life.
Either He will shield you from suffering
or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it.

Be at peace then, and put aside all useless thoughts,
all vain dreads and all anxious imaginations.

—Prayer for Complete Trust in God, St. Francis de Sales.

NOTICES

2017 CHURCH NETWORK CONFERENCE, July 3-6

The Church Network's sixty-first annual conference in National Harbor, Maryland, is an engaging, thought-provoking three-day event offering you multiple ways to network with church leaders, find a mentor, get a sneak preview of emerging technology, and hone your skills. Whether you are new to church leadership or a veteran, it's an event you won't want to miss! To learn more and to register click [here](#).

FORTNIGHT FOR FREEDOM

The Fortnight for Freedom: Freedom for Mission will take place from June 21 to July 4, 2017. More information and resources for your parish from the USCCB are available [here](#).

PETER'S PENCE COLLECTION

Many dioceses will take up the annual Peter's Pence collection to support the charitable work of the Holy Father on the weekend of June 25. The USCCB offers parish resources on its website [here](#).

MIDWEEK REFLECTION EMAIL SIGN-UP

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