

Homily: 12th Sunday in OT 2020

Welcome on the first 'green' Sunday since before the start of Lent. 'Green, 'Ordinary Time' always comes after fasts and feasts. Fasts which are there to prepare us to get ready for whatever the feast is, obviously this time the 50 days of Easter, including the Ascension and followed by Pentecost, The Most Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi, and this year is broken again next weekend as we shall celebrate Saint Peter and St Paul. Today too is the longest day, near the birth of St John Baptist on 24th, 2nd quarter day of the year.

Green too again is the grass I've been mowing, as the rain of June has changed what was becoming brown through lack of rain and much sun.

I always remind you that green time is our growing time, putting into practice what we have celebrated in the feasts.

Three times in the gospel today Jesus says '**Do not be afraid.**' Those or similar words or sentiments come about 365 times throughout the whole of the scriptures, which I think is the Lord saying, 'you need to hear, and therefore heed them, every day.'

They are words certainly during lockdown we need to hear and heed. Life continues to be very different, and not at all easy for anyone, which is why we need to keep each other and the whole world-wide situation very much in prayer.

Most people, as individuals, as groups or as nations do not like to be pushed about. Freedom is very much what we all want for ourselves and each other, and with that comes respect for each other.

Lockdown wherever it across the world has changed so much of all that; freedom to be together, freedom to meet, to shop, to socialise, to go to work, to go to church, to be at Mass; to go to school: the list goes on. Most people on the whole have tackled kindly to it. We are glad things are easing, but we know vigilance will ever be necessary for quite some long time.

As ever our Mass readings come to help us. Jeremiah lived in troubled times. Not a pandemic like now. But more than just the virus are emerging across the world, with many questions, much upheaval going on; signs of that change of era Pope Francis speaks of.

Jeremiah, chosen as a prophet of God, and to speak out to the troubled times, of God. He was called upon to tell people uncomfortable truths, suffered greatly in that calling, but in today's 1st reading refuses to be intimidated by terror from every side.

That does not mean that terror doesn't get to him – he is human, he is a prophet not a robot; but he has no intention of allowing the terror to write his script. Jeremiah has been abandoned by all his friends who now try to discredit him. He is thrown into prison, and goaded almost to despair. But in a magnificent soliloquy, he accuses God of seducing him into accepting a mission that brings only derision and reproach all the day.

He contemplates abandoning his office of prophet, in some words just before our reading begins, but then admits that God's word is like a fire in his bones that he cannot abandon. For he knows that the Lord is at his side, a mighty hero.

What keeps Jeremiah sane amidst all this persecution is his profound belief that **God cares for him**. The book of Jeremiah has several examples of what is prayer to God, reminiscent of the type of Psalm known as an individual lament. It is one reason why the Psalms can be of such help at all times; in good times and in bad, in joys or in sorrows; in pain and grief, in praise and delight.

Today's Psalm verses provide a vivid parallel to the cry of Jeremiah. This psalm is one of the best known of all the individual laments, and the writers of the Gospels made much use of it in their description of the passion of Jesus.

In this Psalm lament, as in the closing verse from Jeremiah, is a cry of confidence in God's saving power.

This links us beautifully with the 2nd reading from Romans, in which St Paul introduces a major theme in his thought; Jesus as the second Adam.

Paul takes the story of man's creation and fall in Genesis chapters 1-3 as truth and saw in it a prefiguring of the eventual purposes of God: 'Adam as the type of the one who was to come.'

That is what makes sense of the phrase in the Exultet at the Easter Vigil: 'O happy fault (*O felix culpa*) that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer'

All picked up by St John Henry Newman's 'Praise to the holiest in the height: the higher gift than grace; and the second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.'

It is Jesus, the second Adam, who in the gospel today, having prepared the disciples, commissions them to go out in his name and proclaim that God's kingdom is close at hand (just a few verses before today's reading begins).

Which is why our reading today is a bit mysterious, for it is about things that are hidden now being revealed tomorrow, about light and dark, and about whispers and proclamations. Above all it is about not being afraid of people who might abuse, arrest, torture, or even execute us when we preach the Good News, because they cannot kill our souls – only God has the power to do that.

Jesus appears in strong voice against intimidation. He does not disguise the truth that his disciples will be confronted by those who threaten, bully and intimidate others into submissive agreement. Jesus' advice is clear: not only does he want his disciples to refuse to submit to the merchants of death; he tells them not to be afraid of them; "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

One reason I have written at length about the June English Saints in this week's newsletter reminds us that most of them were martyrs, for being Catholic Christians, and speaking and holding to the truth.

Most of us will not be called to martyrdom, but certainly we know ridicule, abuse, intimidation, peer and media pressure, persecution and more for our Catholic faith. Jesus says human agents of persecution are not to be feared.

People can impose suffering and death on the body, but cannot force spiritual death on the soul. Jesus uses this distinction between body and

soul to contrast the relative value of earthly life with the absolute good of eternal life in heaven with him.

We know from history, that is one thing that inspired the martyrs on their way to the place of execution. St Justin (1st June; who was from Nablus, in Samaria AD 165) on being questioned by the prefect, “So you imagine that you are going to heaven and will receive some appropriate reward?” To this Justin replied; “It is not a case of imagining, I know: I am certain.”

St Thomas More in his last letter to his daughter Meg wrote, “Pray for me, and I shall pray for you and all your friends that we may merrily meet in heaven.”

The Church, in lockdown, continues to feed and nourish us in Word, if not yet able to receive in Sacrament, and in all that is or isn't going on, we will have opportunities to proclaim one way or another, our faith. It is why at the end of every Mass, having been disciples at his feet, we become apostles, sent out, and bidden ‘Go in peace, and announce the Gospel of the Lord’, or ‘glorifying the Lord by your life.’

For we know that whatever happens, we are under the loving protection of a God who cares for every sparrow that falls from the sky and even knows how many hairs there are on our head, so much does he love us. There is nothing to fear. Do not be afraid, you have worth.

If you believe deep down you are worthless, there is no point: but you are worth enough to overcome any fear.