

**TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (6/21-22/2008)**

***Jeremiah 20/10-13, Psalm 69, Romans 5/12-15, Matthew 10/26-33***

What are the two commands of Jesus that are most often ignored and disobeyed?

In my opinion, and I am not being facetious, they are: 1) Don't worry! 2) Don't be afraid!

The exhortation not to worry is found in *Matthew 6/25*, etc.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says simply: "...*so do not be afraid...*"

Think about it.

Who pays attention to those words?

Not many people I know.

What with so many dangerous people and events threatening all of us, how does Jesus get off telling us not to fear?

He offers two reasons to back up his "fear-less" advice.

First, he says: "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*"

It's a call to an interior courage that understands and values the physical world and its importance, and, at the same time, views the life of the spirit as even more important.

Like the soldier in combat who certainly is concerned for his own welfare, but who, in the midst of battle, is even willing to sacrifice his own life for a buddy.

Jesus knew his disciples would encounter misunderstanding, abuse and even violent death as they sought to pursue their ministry.

He knew it because he himself would undergo similar trials.

In the face of that reality, he simply said: "Don't be afraid!"

After the resurrection, the first Christians would understand more experientially what it means to live in Christ's life, and why they should be unafraid.

The second reason for fearlessness is the fact that God the Father knows us and loves us.

Jesus says: *“Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father’s knowledge. Even all the hairs of your head are counted.”*

Even the hairs of our heads are counted and valued?

Hard to compute, isn’t it?

A cynic might ask what the victims of the earthquake in China and the survivors of the Myanmar cyclone and the Midwest tornados think of all this.

Do they perceive God as caring specifically for them? Would they say their hairs are counted?

No one would blame them if they were skeptical about such reassurance.

They might well feel as if the blind forces of nature betray this “caring” God.

The words of Jesus would offer small comfort to these hapless victims if there were not men and women about who reached out to comfort, offer aid, give them hope.

God’s love for His people is brokered through the generosity and compassion of people helping one another.

But Jesus’ words still stand out as a challenge to all of us, no matter what.

Don’t be afraid; your Father is always, always at your side.