

12th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; June 25th 2023
Jeremiah 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

Dear Sisters & Brothers,

Ever since Adam and Eve committed the first sin of disobedience the fear also crept into their lives. Before that they had no worries and fear in the Paradise. They felt the security of God always around them. After committing the first sin the first feeling they had was the fear of God. So they tried to hide from Him. Once they were evicted from the Garden their fear and worry moved with them always. The feeling of fear is as old as the mankind itself. No one is free from the strong emotion of fear; young and old, rich and poor, all experience fear throughout their lives. The fear can begin within us due to the worries or anxieties we have on various matters in life. Very often we also feel threatened due to the feeling of insecurity. No doubt the security measures are great these days; but the more security devices we have the more insecure we feel. In short, for modern man everything is a big concern and worry and he is not free from the fear any time. The moment when one feels helpless he/she is caught up with fear. The helplessness comes from the feeling that there is nobody to help me in this particular situation and I am all alone. As far as we live in this imperfect world no one can totally escape this situation.

Modern man has the pride of high technology and great medical science in hands. So he thinks that he can subdue everything under his feet. But the entire world has seen for three years how helpless and fear stricken the same man was in the sight of a tiny virus, the COVID. It took thousands of lives and millions became jobless. So it is very clear that everything is not contained in the fist of man. Here comes the role of God in our life. God has not created man and left him helpless; rather He has promised us the help needed. If you take the history of Israel we see the constant help of God moving with them in the desert and the Promised Land. So the people never had any occasion to be helpless or fear stricken. That doesn't mean that God's people never had any struggles or challenges. There were occasions of severe downfall in their life. But God never abandoned His people; rather He lifted them time to time. When Israel listened to the voice of God and kept His Commandments they stood firm; whereas when they abandoned God they were fear stricken and beaten by the enemies. **In the Bible the phrase, fear not or be not afraid appears more than 360 times.**

Jeremiah, in the first reading is under attack for denouncing the injustices of his time. He often complained to God that he never wanted to be a prophet but God called and insisted. Jeremiah was always going through the ups and downs of emotions and

physical threats, constantly calling on God for mercy and justice. He lived with terror and fear. Ultimately, when he simply entrusts his cause to the Lord he became fearless before his adversaries.

Today's gospel is the continuation of last Sunday's gospel. Last Sunday we saw how Jesus instructing his twelve apostles before they were sent out for the first time to preach the gospel. This segment of Matthew's gospel is called the **Discourse on the Mission** and will be continued in next Sunday's gospel reading too. Having foreseen his imminent passion and death and also the severe persecution the apostles had to face in future, Jesus is encouraging the disciples to preach with boldness despite those who will oppose them. Jesus warned them even the loss of their very life. In fact except John, all other apostles were martyred. Matthew had very special reason to add this teaching of Jesus to his gospel. When he wrote the gospel between the periods of 70-100 AD, the persecution against the Christian community was intense and most of the apostles were martyred before 100 AD. No doubt, the apostles and the early Christians were well aware of the warning of Jesus. So they never feared the one who could just kill their body, but could not kill the soul. They always stood boldly against their enemies.

During the time of Jesus the apostles were slowly confirmed in their faith. The gospels relate a few occasions when the apostles were fear stricken and the climax of which was the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus. For 50 long days they hid themselves in a room for fear of the Jews. But things changed after the resurrection of Jesus and especially at Pentecost. In today's gospel Jesus asks his apostles three times, **'fear not.'** Dear friends, Jesus has not promised us a problem free life; rather the cross and the losses. But he has promised us his help. If we really trust in the Lord we will overcome any situations and finally the victory will be ours. Remember, when we carry our cross patiently, he will become the Simon to carry the cross for us. When we feel at loss, please turn to Jesus and then we will hear the gentle voice, **"Fear not it is I." It is said, "Locks are manufactured with keys. Similarly, God never gives problems without solutions. Only we need to have patience to unlock them."**