



Today's Gospel is part of Jesus' mission discourse. The disciples are given reasons why they should be confident as they set out on their mission. Twice they are told, "Do not be afraid." The first time, it is intended to inspire boldness in their preaching. The second time, it is to encourage the disciples to remain steadfast in the face of persecution.

A prominent feature of the Old Testament stories of the calling of prophets is the comforting words: "Do not fear." The preachers of Jesus' message take their place alongside the prophets of old. The message they are to deliver is a bold, public proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. They may have received much of the substance of the message in private teaching from Jesus but the time has now arrived for them to proclaim that word publicly, even "from the rooftops". Many ancient religions claimed to have secret teaching that was only to be made known to those who had undergone lengthy rites of initiation. Christianity made no such claims. Its message was the Gospel, the good news of the coming reign of God, that was to be made known free of charge "to every creature", as Jesus would repeat in his final words after his resurrection.

But such public proclamation runs the risk of persecution and death. The call to confidence is supported by some sayings about God's provident care for the disciple. Mere earthly existence is not as valuable as the life of the soul. The one who has dominion over the life of both body and soul is the compassionate Father in heaven. Two comparisons of God's providence drive the point home. Sparrows, the smallest of birds, might appear to be of insignificant value but the Father keeps count even of them. By the same token, every hair on the human head has been counted and a human being is worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

The discussion of persecution introduces the theme of public witness. Declaring oneself for Jesus was part of Christian martyrdom. A disciple was a martyr because he or she had given public testimony for Jesus before the courts. The other side of martyrdom is that Jesus, the first witness, will in turn give evidence on behalf of the disciple in the heavenly court. The contrary is also true: a disciple who is so paralysed by fear that he or she publicly disowns Jesus will in turn be disowned by him before the heavenly court. ■

SAY

"Lord, do not allow me to abandon or deny you in times of difficulty. Give me the strength to always speak your word."

REFLECT

Matthew stresses that faith in Jesus can never be a purely private matter to be kept under wraps. This doesn't mean it is only preachers who give testimony to their faith in Jesus. When St Francis of Assisi was sending out his first friars to preach the good news, he told them "Preach the Gospel to every creature, using words if necessary."

Francis appreciated the importance of the witness of life, that everything we do and say is a witness to the Gospel. That witness can be as risky as the preached message. Confessing faith in Jesus publicly will earn the right to have him stand as our witness on the day of judgement. ■

LEARN

"Persecutions are not a reality of the past, for today too we experience them, whether by the shedding of blood, as is the case with so many contemporary martyrs, or by more subtle means, by slander and lies. Jesus calls us blessed when people "utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account". At other times, persecution can take the form of gibes that try to caricature our faith and make us seem ridiculous." – Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*

DO

Think about how you witness to the Gospel every day, whether at work, school or at home. How good a witness are you?



PRAY

Jesus tells us that we have nothing to fear. God has counted every hair on our heads. God is as close to us as our very own heartbeat. Thank the Lord for the gift of his love. Ask God to deepen your faith and trust in him.

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The Lord is the strength of his people,
a saving refuge for the one he has anointed.
Save your people, Lord, and bless your
heritage,
and govern them for ever.

COLLECT

Grant, O Lord,
that we may always revere and love your
holy name,
for you never deprive of your guidance
those you set firm on the foundation of your
love.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of
the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

FIRST READING Jeremiah 20:10-13

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah.
Jeremiah said:
I hear so many disparaging me,
"Terror from every side!"
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
All those who used to be my friends watched
for my downfall,
"Perhaps he will be seduced into error.
Then we will master him
and take our revenge!"
But the Lord is at my side, a mighty hero;
my opponents will stumble, mastered,
confounded by their failure;
everlasting, unforgettable disgrace will be
theirs.
But you, Lord of Hosts, you who probe with
justice,
who scrutinise the loins and heart,
let me see the vengeance you will take on
them,
for I have committed my cause to you.
Sing to the Lord,
praise the Lord,
for he has delivered the soul of the needy
from the hands of evil men.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM Psalm 68

Response:
In your great love, answer me, O God.

- It is for you that I suffer taunts,
that shame covers my face,
that I have become a stranger to my
brothers,
an alien to my own mother's sons.
I burn with zeal for your house
and taunts against you fall on me. (R.)
- This is my prayer to you,
my prayer for your favour.
In your great love, answer me, O God,
with your help that never fails:
Lord, answer, for your love is kind;
in your compassion, turn towards me. (R.)
- The poor when they see it will be glad
and God-seeking hearts will revive;
for the Lord listens to the needy
and does not spurn his servants in their
chains.
Let the heavens and earth give him praise,
the sea and all its living creatures. (R.)

SECOND READING Romans 5:12-15

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the
Romans.
Sin entered the world through one man, and
through sin death, and thus death has spread
through the whole human race because
everyone has sinned. Sin existed in the world
long before the Law was given. There was no
law and so no one could be accused of the
sin of "law-breaking", yet death reigned over
all from Adam to Moses, even though their
sin, unlike that of Adam, was not a matter of
breaking a law.
Adam prefigured the One to come, but the
gift itself considerably outweighed the fall.
If it is certain that through one man's fall so
many died, it is even more certain that divine
grace, coming through the one man, Jesus
Christ, came to so many as an abundant free
gift.
The word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION
Alleluia, alleluia!
The Word was made flesh and lived among
us;
to all who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Matthew 10:26-33

A reading from the holy Gospel according to
Matthew.
Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: "Do
not be afraid. For everything that is now
covered will be uncovered, and everything
now hidden will be made clear. What I say to
you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you
hear in whispers, proclaim from the house-
tops.
"Do not be afraid of those who kill the
body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather
who can destroy both body and soul in hell.
Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny?
And yet not one falls to the ground without
your Father knowing. Why, every hair on
your head has been counted. So there is no
need to be afraid; you are worth more than
hundreds of sparrows.
"So if anyone declares himself for me in
the presence of men, I will declare myself for
him in the presence of my Father in heaven.
But the one who disowns me in the presence
of men, I will disown in the presence of my
Father in heaven."
The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PROFESSION OF FAITH
I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with
the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,

(all bow during the next three lines)
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the
Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under
Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord,
the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored
and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and
apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness
of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the
dead
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS
Receive, O Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation
and praise
and grant that, cleansed by its action,
we may make offering of a heart pleasing to
you.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

COMMUNION ANTIPHON
The eyes of all look to you, Lord,
and you give them their food in due season.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION
Renewed and nourished
by the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of
your Son,
we ask of your mercy, O Lord,
that what we celebrate with constant
devotion
may be our sure pledge of redemption.
Through Christ our Lord
Amen.

"To be connected with the church is to be
associated with scoundrels, warmongers,
fakes, child molesters, murderers, adulterers,
and hypocrites of every description. It also,
at the same time, identifies you with the saints
and the finest persons of heroic soul within
every time, country, race, and gender. To be a
member of the church is to carry the mantle
of both the worst sin and the finest heroism
of soul... because the church always looks
exactly as it looked at the original crucifixion,
God hung among thieves."

Ronald Rolheiser OMI