

In this Sunday's Gospel, the invitation Jesus addresses to His disciples resonates: to have no fear, to be strong and confident in the face of life's challenges, as He forewarns them of the adversities that await them. Today's passage is part of the missionary discourse, with which the Teacher prepares the Apostles for their first experience of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Jesus persistently exhorts them “not to be afraid”, “do not be afraid”, and Jesus describes three tangible situations that they will find themselves facing.

“DO NOT BE AFRAID, OPEN WIDE YOUR HEART TO CHRIST.” JP II

First and foremost, the first, the hostility of those who would like to stifle the Word of God by sugar-coating it, by watering it down or by silencing those who proclaim it. (Christian nationalism, far-right using crosses as instrument of division, Trump and co attacking the Pope!!!) Imagine the amount of money, lies, deceit, propaganda to convince people that a political movement that demonises the poor, worships the rich, takes healthcare away from the sick, food assistance from the hungry, dehumanises immigrants, disenfranchises minorities, erodes women's rights, cares only about their children, engages in endless wars, and ransacks the planet for profit represents the way of Jesus!!! Pope Leo said last week at the Sagrada Familia in Spain: “ We cannot believe in Jesus and promote war. We cannot believe in Jesus and kill the innocent. We cannot believe in Jesus and abandon those who suffer, those who weep, those who flee from misery.”

In this case, Jesus encourages the Apostles to spread the message of salvation that He has entrusted to them. For the moment, He has transmitted it cautiously, somewhat covertly within the small group of the disciples. But they are to utter His Gospel “in the light”, that is, openly; and are to proclaim it “from the housetops” - as Jesus says - that is, publicly.

COMMUNICATING THE JOY OF THE GOSPEL, MERCY...LOVE

The second difficulty that Christ's followers will encounter is the physical threat against them, that is, direct persecution against them personally, to the point of being killed. Jesus's prophesy is fulfilled in every age: it is a painful reality, but it attests to the faithfulness of the witnesses. How many Christians are persecuted even today throughout the world! (mention the stories from Jerusalem and the Occupied territories!) They suffer for the Gospel with love, they are the martyrs of our day. And we can say with certainty that there are more of them than the martyrs of the early times: so many martyrs, merely for the fact of being Christians. Jesus advises these disciples of yesterday and today who suffer persecution: “do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” (v. 28). There is no need to be frightened of those who seek to extinguish the evangelising force with arrogance and violence. Indeed, they can do nothing against the soul, that is, against their union with God: no one can take this away

from the disciples, because it is a gift from God. The only fear that a disciple should have is to lose this divine gift, this closeness to and friendship with God, to stop living according to the Gospel, thereby experiencing moral death, which is the effect of sin.

“PREFER NOTHING TO CHRIST!” St Benedict

The third type of trial that Jesus indicates the Apostles will find themselves facing is the sensation, which some may feel, that God Himself has abandoned them, remaining distant and silent. Could this be you, me today, ill, anxious, stress, going through tough times? Here too, Jesus exhorts them and us not to fear, because even while experiencing these and other pitfalls, the lives of the disciples rest firmly in the hands of God, who loves us and looks after us. They are like the three temptations: to sugar-coat the Gospel, to water it down; second, persecution; and third, the sensation that God has abandoned us. Even Jesus suffered this trial in the garden of olives and on the cross: “Father, why have you forsaken me?”, says Jesus. At times one feels this spiritual aridness. We must not be afraid of it. The Father takes care of us, because we are greatly valued in His eyes. What is important is the frankness, the courage of our witness, of our witness of faith: “recognizing Jesus before others” and continuing to do good.

EQUALITY IN DISCERNING AND LEARNING FROM GOD.... THROUGH SUFFERING AND HOPE...

We are completely in God’s hands! The trials we encounter for our faith and our commitment to the Gospel are occasions to give witness; we must not distance ourselves from the Lord, but instead abandon ourselves even more to him, to the power of his Spirit and his grace. At the end Jesus makes a promise which is a guarantee of victory. There is so much hope in His message He is calling us to hope and patience, to be able to wait for the certain fruits of salvation, trusting in the profound meaning of life and of history: the trials and difficulties are part of the bigger picture; the Lord, the Lord of history, leads all to fulfilment. Despite the turmoil and disasters that upset the world, God’s design of goodness and mercy will be fulfilled! And this is our hope: go forward on this path, in God’s plan which will be fulfilled. This is our hope.

It is the attitude of hope in God, which allows us not to be overwhelmed by tragic events. Indeed, they are an “opportunity to bear witness“ . Christ’s disciples cannot remain slaves to fears and anxieties; instead, they are called to live history, **to stand up** to the destructive force of evil, with the certainty that the Lord’s action of goodness is always accompanied by His providential and reassuring tenderness. This is the eloquent sign that the Kingdom of God is coming to us, that is, that the realization of the world as God wants it is approaching. It is He, the Lord, Who guides our existence and knows the ultimate purpose of things and events.

The Lord calls us to collaborate in the construction of history, becoming, together with Him, peacemakers, reconcilers, and witnesses of hope in a future of salvation and resurrection. Faith makes us walk with Jesus on the very often tortuous roads of this world, in the certainty that the power of His Spirit will bend the forces of evil, subjecting them to the power of God's love. Love is superior, love is more powerful, because it is God: God is love. The Christian martyrs are an example to us – our martyrs, of our times too, who are more numerous than those of the beginnings – who, despite persecution, are men and women of peace. They give us an inheritance to preserve and imitate: the Gospel of love and mercy. Desmond Tutu said “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressors..” This is the most precious treasure that has been given to us and the most effective witness that we can give to our contemporaries, responding to hatred with love, to offence with forgiveness. Even in our daily lives: when we receive an offence, we feel pain; but we must forgive from the heart. When we feel we are hated, we must pray with love for the person who hates us. May the Virgin Mary, through her maternal intercession, sustain our daily journey of faith, following the Lord Who guides history. Jesus' message causes us to reflect on our present time and gives us the strength to face it with courage and hope, with Mary who always accompanies us.

(Summary and prayer)

May Mary Most Holy, model of trust and abandonment in God in the hour of adversity and danger, help us never to surrender to despair, but rather always to entrust ourselves to Him and to His grace, since the grace of God is always more powerful than evil. Amen.