

Rev. Joseph Keating
12th Sunday of Ordinary Time (A)
Homily

As we reflect on the Gospel reading we just heard, we can tease out three main ideas that Jesus seems to emphasize today:

1. Do not be afraid.
2. The Gospel is meant to be shared
3. Trust in God's providence

First, Jesus tells us, "Do not be afraid," or, "Fear no one." Jesus says it three times in this short Gospel passage. He must have been trying to tell us something.

I can remember, as a child, being afraid of swimming lessons. Before I learned to move myself thru the water, I was terrified of the deep end of the pool. I would grip onto the sides when venturing past that dreaded 4' mark. Even clinging to the sides, the water felt thinner, colder, scarier. I never liked being in water even a few inches deeper than my chin.

Then something changed, though I don't know exactly when it happened. Probably it was the first day I was forced to jump off of the diving board. The instructor was below the board, ready to help us if we started to sink. But of course, no one did. Jumping from that low height, my head barely went under the water, and it was a short dog-paddle to the side of the pool. Slowly, I realized that swimming was actually fun. Diving was fun. Jumping and flipping and cannonballing was fun. And the fears I had melted away in the summer sun.

I am sure you can all think of a similar experience, some moment in your life when you were afraid to do something, and then overcame your fears. Maybe now you're an expert in that thing you were so afraid of. Why should it be any different with living our faith? Why is it so scary to mention the name of Jesus at work, at school, or even at home around the supper table? What fears are holding you back from bearing witness to Jesus?

Perhaps it's a desire to fit in with a group that holds different religious beliefs. Perhaps we don't want to say anything controversial, because then we would have to defend our position, and then we fear we'd look foolish because we don't have all the answers. Perhaps we're afraid others will see us as hypocrites, because

surely everyone remembers our past sins. Best to avoid attracting attention. But that way of thinking is all based on fear, and fear does not come from God.

Jesus reassures us that the person of Faith has no reason to fear. He says that God knows every sparrow in the land, and so how much more does he care for each of us who are worth so much more than a sparrow? God knows every hair on your head, and *he is in control*. His justice will be done in the end. Even though our enemies on earth may be able to threaten our lives, they cannot kill our souls. “The souls of the just are in the hands of God.”¹ So **do not be afraid** to speak the name of God and of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This phrase, “do not be afraid,” always reminds me of Pope St. John Paul II. St. John Paul II was known for saying this same phrase, “Do not be afraid.” In fact, he also repeats it three times in this often-quoted line from his homily at his inauguration Mass:

Brothers and sisters, **do not be afraid** to welcome Christ and accept his power. Help the Pope and all those who wish to serve Christ, and with Christ's power, to serve the human person and the whole of mankind. **Do not be afraid**. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. **Do not be afraid**.²

The Pope’s appeal leads me to the second point of the gospel today: The Gospel is meant to be shared, not for us to keep to ourselves. Jesus says to proclaim it on the housetops! St. John Paul II says, “Open wide the doors to Christ!” The Gospel is meant to be shared with everyone.

I have this friend who used to be a practicing Catholic, but he’s no longer practicing his Faith. A few years ago, his first son was born. When I asked him if he was going to baptize his son, he said, “Well, we’re going to wait until he’s old enough to make that decision for himself.” I was dumbfounded. What I wanted to ask him back was:

¹ Wisdom 3:1

² Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of his Pontificate, 22 October 1978

“Do you plan on taking your son to school? If so, why? It must be important to him to receive an education. Will you take your son to get vaccinated? If so, why? It’s important to be protected from the most harmful diseases. Then, why not take him to Church? What does that say about how important God is? How is he supposed to decide whether he wants to be baptized if you don’t introduce him to God and his Church? He’s just a baby; he won’t know unless you teach him. Why hold back the gift of knowing God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ?”

I think I know the answer to that. Some of us baptized Catholics never learn to foster that daily relationship of prayer and communication with our God. We might be ashamed to approach him because of our sin. Or we might not really believe that he’s real. If we Catholics are not taking time for personal prayer every day, then it’s no surprise when the relationship never matures, and we cease to be disciples. And if we are not disciples ourselves, then how will we ever manage to make more disciples?

It is the mission of the Church to bring Christ out into the world, and the first place we do that is within our families. We pass on the Faith in so many ways, by having religious images in our homes, by praying with our kids, by learning together about Sacred Scripture and the Catechism, and by the formation of our consciences. All of this formation happens primarily in the home.

From our homes, the domestic church, we go out on mission into the world. Our faith is meant to be shared. We go to school, to work, or even on vacation, and we don’t check our Faith at the door. It’s part of who we are, and it’s essential to our mission—to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ. To share him with those around us. How will they know about our Faith if we hide it away? How will they hear the name of Jesus if we are afraid to say it? The good news of Jesus Christ is not to be kept to ourselves. It is to be proclaimed.

How shall we proclaim it? It is not a matter of preaching fire and brimstone from atop a soap box on a street corner. It is not about obnoxiously spouting Bible verses and acting self-righteous. These are caricatures of reality. It is not about joining the currently popular social movement out of a misplaced hope for justice. Social movements are human creations, and they are always destined to destroy themselves, but the Gospel is Divine Revelation, and it is eternal and true.

In real life, a Catholic family proclaims the gospel when they pray together at the restaurant before they dig in. The business owner proclaims the gospel when he hires an ex-convict and give him a chance at redemption. The student proclaims the gospel when she refuses to cheat in order to get ahead or to gossip so to climb the ladder of popularity. We proclaim the gospel when we let go of the control we think we have and let God be in control.

And that leads me to my third point: trust in God's providence. Do not fear—God will provide. Even when we think God has forgotten us, God will provide.

I have this priest friend who once went to a cookout with some families from church. It was a holiday weekend, and they were out at the lake. They had bought their hot dogs and all the fixings, and they were about ready to start serving, when someone asked, "Who brought the hot dog buns?" They asked everyone, and the hostess was so embarrassed when she realized that no one had brought hot dog buns. What a disaster! You can't have a cookout without hot dog buns! Just then, one of the elderly women of the family began to earnestly and sincerely pray aloud that God provide them with their hot dog buns. My priest friend thought to himself, "Really? Isn't that a little bit trivial, or even presumptuous, to ask God for hot dog buns?" But just as he was thinking that, one of the little girls came running up from the truck, holding two big bags and shouting, "*Mira!* Hot dog buns!" Nobody admitted to buying any buns that day. God provides even our most basic needs.

This is a simple example about a small thing. But how are we on the big things? Can we trust that God will provide our needs if we decide to keep our marriages open to life? Or do we cling to control, out of fear of getting pregnant? As if there will not be enough to go around? I would challenge you to trust in God's providence. It's OK, you can trust him. God will not be outdone in generosity.

Open up your hearts in generosity, and you will be rich in what matters most—LOVE. And, as it says in St. John's first epistle, "Perfect love casts out all fear."³ So trust in God's providence. Share Jesus with someone today. And do not be afraid.

³ 1 John 4:18