

"Fear no one"

Divine Encouragement and Inspiration

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Year A

Jeremiah 20:10-13

Psalms 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35 (14c)

Romans 5:12-15

Matthew 10:26-33

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the word "encourage" as "to inspire with courage, spirit, or hope." The word "inspire" has a similar definition: "to influence, move, or guide the intellect or emotions" but includes "by divine or supernatural action or power."

Jesus was not above giving his disciples encouragement. As the Son of God, His words also have all the marks of inspiration.

It is well worth while to read, in its entirety, Jesus' "Missionary Discourse" in the Gospel of Matthew (9:35-10:42). In this passage Jesus formally names the Twelve Apostles and gives them the mission to preach. In addition to giving them specific instructions on how they are to conduct themselves when visiting the various towns (10:5b-15), Jesus assures them of the great trials and hostility that await them as they carry out their mission, even from among family and friends. He proclaims without equivocation: "What I am doing is sending you out like

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sheep among wolves..." (Mt 10:16-21). He assures them that His mission is not to spread peace, but upheaval (Mt 10:34-39), and admonishes them to "hold out until the end" if they are to escape death (Mt 10:22).

With promises and warnings of such expectations, which are to come as part and parcel of preaching the Kingdom of God, indeed of following Jesus at all, it is understandable that some may react with a certain degree of anticipation, perhaps some reluctance, if not outright fear. After all, who would sign up for such a task if it is to include such tribulation and unabashed hostility?

It is in the midst of the Missionary Discourse that Jesus utters His words of encouragement. These words not only (from the perspective of Jesus) encourage His Apostles, but also (from the perspective of Matthew's early readers) inspire the Church itself, who had already experienced the very hostility Jesus promised.

To the Apostles Jesus gives a divine pep-talk. "Fear no one" (Mt 10:26); "Do

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not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Mt 10:28). As regards the deviance of the opposition, Jesus declares that it will be short-lived: "Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed..." (Mt 10:26). Finally, Jesus points out God's care for the cheapest life in the market, "are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?" comparing it to the immense care and worth the Father has for those His Son has called (Mt 10:29-31).

Today, when we experience social, cultural and political hostilities toward Christianity both at home and abroad, when we hear of violence against Christians in various parts of the world we realize that the Church of today is not so far removed from the disciples to whom Jesus preached and the infant Church for whom Matthew wrote. It can be easy to get discouraged; to believe we are engaged in an impossible mission that falls on deaf

ears, lands on barren soil, or provokes umbrage, antagonism, resentment, even downright hatred. Some may even experience the temptation, or resort to ultimately denying Jesus before others (Mt 10:33).

Jesus, however, continues to give that divine encouragement, nothing less than His direct inspiration. He calls on us to be strong, diligent, consistent and, above all, faithful in acknowledging Him before

others, regardless of the reception we, His followers, receive. His inspiration is received by us as we move forward to carry on the mission He gave to the first disciples, under the leadership of the Twelve Apostles.

The mission He gave to the Apostles is our mission. His encouragement to them is our encouragement.

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