

## TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### June 21, 2020 Cycle A

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *Loving God, thank you for gathering us together to share your Word and our lives. When fear, betrayal and threats of any kind enter across our path, help us to turn to you and believe that with your help, we can fight any battle. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** *Trust God in times of fear* is a thread that ties all three readings together. In the first reading, people are trying to intimidate Jeremiah. He is able to withstand their threats because of his trust in God. "God is with me as my mighty champion." In the Gospel, Jesus prepares his disciples for the hostile reaction to the preaching of his message. In the second reading, Paul celebrates salvation in Christ as a gift which empowers us to deal with fear and free us from the only things that should truly make us fearful, namely, sin, death, and separation from God.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

#### **FIRST READING: Jeremiah 20:10-13**

Jeremiah has often been called a "reluctant" prophet. When God calls Jeremiah, he tells God that he is not much of a talker. But once he says 'Yes' to God's call, he speaks what he feels God wants him to say, even if his message enrages religious and civil leaders and his own peers. He has to frequently call the leaders and people to repentance of infidelity to their covenant with God.

Today's reading is an excerpt from what is called the "Confessions of Jeremiah" – a revelation of the personal anguish the prophet experiences in his soul as he carries out his ministry (e.g., "Why is God allowing all this bad stuff to happen to me?"). Jeremiah is being persecuted by the people for his unwelcome words. They cry out: "Denounce, let us denounce him!" We can almost feel Jeremiah's sense of rejection. But his trust is in God, his mighty champion.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples not to let fear intimidate them but to place their trust in God. Jeremiah is a wonderful example of someone who acts on this Word of Jesus. We also notice how Jeremiah has no problem asking God to avenge his persecutors, "Let me witness the vengeance you take on them."

#### **RESPONSORIAL PSALM 69**

This is a psalm of lament used during a worship service by an individual undergoing a time of personal suffering. It clearly echoes Jeremiah's experience of rejection.

#### **SECOND READING: Romans 5:12-15**

For the next 12 weeks, our second reading will be from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

The opening verse: "Through one man, sin entered the world..." is the basis of the Catholic Church's doctrine on original sin as taught by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century.

Paul contrasts Adam (the cause of sin) to Christ (the cause of grace). Whereas the universality of sin springs from the disobedience of Adam, the superabundance of grace flows from Christ.

Adam's sin unleashed as it were a 'sin force' into the world. Because of Adam's sin, we are born flawed and with a proclivity to sin. We know that sin is present in our world and in our family tree when we see children emulating the misdeeds and imperfections of their

parents and of society. Sin is also manifest in the greed and self-centeredness that prevail in our world today. But the grace that comes to us in the sacraments and in other ways is, of course, greater than the sin we have to deal with.

**PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 10:26-33**

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

**GOSPEL: Matthew 10:26-33**

Jesus is well aware of the many challenges that will face all who choose to follow him in faith and preach in his name. A little earlier he says: “*I am sending you like sheep among wolves*” (Mt.10:16). Jesus gives an exhortation that will be recalled in the future when the Church will face persecution: “*Fear no one. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.*”

In order to underline his message to “not be afraid,” Jesus uses two images to speak of God’s care for each of us. He says: “If God cares for sparrows” (regarded as the least of all animals) and “if God numbers even the hairs of our head” (assuming we still have some ☺), how much more will he care for us who are more than many sparrows?” Then he adds a solemn warning: “*Whoever denies (Jesus) before others will be denied by his heavenly Father.*” In the verse: “*Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known,*” the thing hidden is probably a reference to the teaching of Jesus. In time, his disciples will proclaim from the housetops what was previously whispered.

**FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

*The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.*

2. Can you recall a time or experience when God was with you like a ‘mighty champion’? Have you ever asked God to strike down those who have hurt you grievously?

3. What can strike fear into your heart? What helps you deal with fear?

4. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

**RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD**

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Be aware of where fear rules in your life and seek to combat it with courage and trust in God.

**JOURNALING.** *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

**PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. *Lord, you know when fear strikes my heart, I find it hard to combat it with trust in you. Fill me with the courage and trust I need to deal with what frightens me.*

**CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

**Facilitator:** What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray for all who have recently received a bad medical diagnosis and for all who are fearful of losing their jobs and homes.

## **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

### **When Fearful**

**Lord, we ask you to deliver us**  
**from fear of the unknown future:**  
**from fear of failure,**  
**from fear of poverty,**  
**from fear of bereavement,**  
**from fear of loneliness,**  
**from fear of sickness and pain,**  
**from fear of age, and**  
**from fear of death.**

**Help us, Father, by your grace to love you**  
**above all, and to fear nothing.**

**Fill our hearts with cheerful courage**  
**and loving trust in you.**

**Through our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.**  
**Amen.**

### **A Reflection**

Dr. Sheila Cassidy went to Chile to work among the poorest of the poor. One day she treated an opposition leader. The secret police learned about it, arrested her, and tortured her. She writes in *Audacity to Believe*:

*“After four days of physical pain ...I was left completely alone in a small room.... Incredibly ...I was filled with hope, for I knew ...that God was with me, and that nothing they could do to me could change that.”*

Sheila then understood Jesus’ words, *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”*

(© January 1, 1978, Dr. Sheila Cassidy, *“Audacity to Believe”*, by Harper Collins Publishing Company, New York, New York.)

For further reading, see my writings on the parish website, [www.ascensioncatholic.net](http://www.ascensioncatholic.net) (scroll down to Miscellaneous Articles, and click on *How to Deal with Fear*).