

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jun 25th 2017

Jesus said to the Twelve:

"Fear no one. ...

And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul ...

So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ...

Everyone who acknowledges me before others

I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father."

It is wonderful that the first thing Jesus does, after calling his apostles to follow him, is to try to take away their fear? Jesus knows that fear is the enemy of generous, heroic service. If Jesus is to call others to follow in the path before him, he must first en-courage them. He gives courage to replace fear. The courage he gives comes from a confidence in his promises. Isn't this the dynamic that's operative in our lives, too? When I reflect on what keeps me from a greater and deeper commitment to service of others, the answer is always: because of some fear. Fear is complicated. If I open up the various "excuses" or "things that keep me from" a greater surrender of myself in love and service of others, somewhere underneath I always discover some fear.

Self-preservation is a good instinct. Without it, we would have no natural defenses to predators or enemies. Self-care is a good thing. Without it, we risk squandering the gifts of life God has given us. However, in a world in which there is no transcendent reality - no reality beyond the day to day battle for survival - self becomes the ultimate concern. The ultimate imbalance in life is to see everything and everyone in relation what is best for me. Fear of losing oneself - or any part oneself - can lead one to wake up in the morning and go through the entire day wrapped up in self.

How do I look? How am I coming across? How is this a slight to me? How can I win here? I'm not going to be the one to give in here. I really need to score here. I deserve a little attention that I'm not getting. What about me? Nobody's paying attention to my needs here. They're not going to get the best of me. Watch me manipulate my way around this. It's either him or me. I can't do that; I need to take care of myself. I'm already over-committed. I can only do so much. I don't have time. I have my priorities. I have my boundaries. You can't let people take advantage of you. I'm not my sister's keeper.

This is not a happy way of life. Can this be what Jesus meant when he said, "If you try to save your life, you will lose it"?

When Jesus says, "Don't be afraid," he is telling us that we can place our lives in his hands. He is telling us that he has already taken care of the ultimate "self-preservation." No one can ever take that away. We will live forever. We are only here on this earth, in this life, for a brief time. In helping us keep our ultimate goal and meaning in perspective, Jesus is empowering us with great freedom. Our hearts need not be occupied with ourselves. If we are liberated from this debilitating self-pre-occupation, we are freed to give our lives away, in great and heroic acts of love and service.

Imagine how different our lives could be, if in the face of self-centering fear, we would pause and say, "Courage my soul; I don't need that fear; be brave; be free; trust in Jesus' care." Imagine if I "tuned out" or "turned off" the inner voice of self-absorption, and became absorbed in the needs of others today. Can this be what Jesus meant when he said, "If you lose your life for my sake, you will find it"?

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