

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

The first reading this weekend comes from the prophet Isaiah. In it, the prophet proclaims:

Say to those whose hearts are frightened:

Be strong, fear not!

Here is your God (Isaiah 35:4)

This is a message of which we so easily lose track: God tells us not to be afraid. Fear is a terrible thing; it leads us away from God and into darkness. God wants us to know that we can trust Him.

Do we trust Him, though? Let's be honest: when we look around the world at all of the violence and hatred and destruction and greed, it can be hard to trust that an all-loving God is really more powerful! We look at the people we know who have lost their jobs, and, out of fear, we save up and store everything we can in case that ever happens to us. We put so many "safeties" in place so that we never have to deal with the struggles of "going without."

With all of this, God sees two things. The first is that no matter how many levels and layers of protection we have, it will never be enough. All that we have, we will eventually lose. All we save up can be taken away in an instant. A heart attack or stroke can change our lives suddenly. A crash in our economy could make our money worthless. Nothing we can do will *really* protect us from suffering and pain. Nothing we store up for ourselves will be enough against the "enemy" of death that we will all eventually face.

The second is that God knows how much He loves us. He wants us to see this, too! He wants us to trust Him, for He is truly trustworthy! He wants us to know that there is nothing bigger, nothing more powerful than God. As kids on the playground, we can say with surety, "My Dad's bigger than your dad" to the enemies of our souls. Our God is greater! He is more powerful! And He is a tender lover, who will let no one and nothing touch His children, when we are in His arms. Look at the Gospel today. People bring to Jesus a deaf man with a speech impediment. Most would say this is too big to handle. Jesus, with great love for this man, says, "*Ephphatha!*" – that is, "Be opened!" (Mark 7:34), and suddenly the man could hear and speak! This was NOT too big for God!

You see, God wants us to run to Him when we are in trouble. He doesn't say we will never hurt, never suffer, never have difficulties. In fact, He promises these things to us (remember that we have to take up our Crosses). However, He does promise that if we run to Him, He will not abandon us, He will not forsake us, He will never forget us, He will give us the strength we need to make it through the cross. In fact, He promises greater things still – eternal life with Him!

Fear keeps us away, though. There is that lack of trust where we say, "I don't think God will come through for me. Oh yes, He always does for the saints, but I'm no saint." Don't you see, though, that it is not that God will be with those who are worthy, and not with those who are not. Rather, it is the saints who **ran to Him** even in their difficulties, who trusted Him even to the end. Too often, instead of running to God and trusting Him, we cringe in fear, and don't let God run our lives. He longs for that moment of surrender when we say, "I can't, God, but You can!"

So do not look at your sin and say, "God won't help me." Do not look at your desperate circumstances and say, "this is too big for God." Do not look at unknown future and say, "God can't control this." Rather throw yourself with abandon into the gentle and merciful and tender and powerful arms of God, and let Him take care of your fear and doubt. Let Him take care of the unknown. He loves it when we see, "**Here is your God!**"