



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the Gospel this weekend, Jesus says,

Fear no one.... do not be afraid of those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.... So do not be afraid. (Matthew 10:26, 28, 31)

Three times in this short passage, Jesus tells us not to fear. I've heard it said that in the Bible, God says some form of "Do not be afraid" three-hundred, sixty-five times – one for each day of the year! Do you think He really means it? I'll bet He does!

Despite the constant call not to fear, we still spend much of our time in fear. We're afraid to get sick (especially with the Coronavirus), we're afraid of economic disaster, we're afraid of what may lie in the future, we're afraid of being alone, we're afraid of death, we're afraid of embarrassment, we're afraid of failure, etc.. Many times, we may not even be aware of our fears, but they drive our decisions and keep us paralyzed. My experience has shown me that I am able to face my fears, or at least surrender them to God, only when I consciously recognize them. If, however, I don't pay attention to my fears, they end up driving my decisions on a subconscious level. Are we aware of our fears?

The other question is: Do we trust that God really has our backs? He really does love us, He wants the best for us, and is "bigger than any other kid on the playground." As much as we get bullied by our fears, God is bigger. In the immortal words of Larry the Cucumber, "God is bigger than the Boogeyman" ("Where's God When I'm Scared" *Veggie Tales*).

Jesus makes it clear that we don't even have to fear death. In fact, He says not to fear physical death, but only eternal death. This makes perfect sense, since, if we are in God's grace, physical death is really just the labor-pains for entrance into God's eternal and loving embrace! In death, we go into the arms of God. As much as we may fear death, Jesus reminds us that it is nothing to fear. By faith, we know that death has no power over us, if we belong to God. To bring this home, He goes through it Himself, taking on the bitter taste of death so that we can see that He has overcome it.

But what about the death of our souls? Jesus is very clear that our souls can die. This happens when we sin in a serious way, knowing it is serious, and freely choosing it anyway. Traditionally, we have called this mortal sin. Remember that sin is not merely breaking God's law (as if He were a legislator of random laws that make no real sense for our lives). Sin goes against the very heart of God. Mortal sin, then, breaks our relationship with God – saying, implicitly, that I would rather have "this" evil more than God's love. Venial sin, while not breaking our relationship with God, does hurt it, the way we can wound our relationships with those in our lives, without fully breaking them.

Because God is life itself, and eternal life means life eternally with God – filled with all of His love, joy, and peace forever, as we grow closer to God in the eternal embrace of Heaven – to reject God in mortal sin is to bring death to our souls. This, Jesus says, is what is to be feared. (Thanks be to God, He is a God of resurrection, and we have the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to resuscitate our souls.) I have found most often that we sin, especially mortal sin, because we don't trust God. We don't trust Him when He says to sin is to invite death into our souls. We don't trust Him to fulfill our deepest desires, to fill our emptiness, to bring us the happiness for which we long. And so, we fear instead of trusting Him.

A question to ponder – in this time of isolation and "lock-down," many time-busy things have stopped. Have we taken the time to care for that which is most important, for the eternal life of our souls? If we haven't done this now, there will never be a "later" that will be better. I encourage you: *today*, make the choice to work on your soul. I invite you to take all of the fears that vie for your attention and surrender them to Jesus. Make an act of trust in God and strive to live well not just for another twenty or fifty or a hundred years, but for eternity.