

## DEACON GEORGE'S HOMILY FOR TWELFTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME

In our first reading, Jeremiah refuses to be intimidated by terror from every side. But that doesn't mean that the terror doesn't get to him, Jeremiah is a prophet, not a robot. It means that he has no intention of allowing the terror to write his script or dictate who he is.

Jeremiah has been abandoned by all his friends, who now try to discredit him. He is thrown into prison for all his preaching, and the army council threatens him with death, if he doesn't change his tune. But Jeremiah refuses to be bullied into agreement because, he believes "***the Lord is with me as a dread warrior.***" But what keeps Jeremiah sane, amidst all this persecution, it is the profound belief that God cares for him. And less spiritually, he hopes that God will clobber all his enemies in good time.

Last Sunday, we heard of Jesus sending out his Apostles on their first mission to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This Sunday Jesus is telling the Apostles to "***Have no fear of them ...***". He does not disguise the truth, that his apostles will be confronted by those who threaten, bully and intimidate others into submissive agreement. Jesus' advice is clear, not only does he want his apostles to refuse to submit to his adversaries, he tells them not to be afraid of them "***And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and the body in hell.***"

Jesus argues that the father cares deeply for true Apostles. He takes example of a sparrow, which is almost regarded as worthless. Sparrows were sold in the market-place as food for the poor, two for a penny, five for tuppence. The fifth sparrow was thrown in for nothing. Yet Jesus says "***and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.***" So, there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows. Jesus' point is very important, do not be afraid, **you are worth.** According to Jesus, your own sense of worth, is strong enough to overcome your sense of fear.

If you believe deep down that you are worthless, there is no point in defending anything. Anyone can intimidate a sparrow. Anyone can intimidate those who regard themselves as worthless. But if you believe that **who you are** and **what you stand for** add up to some **worth**, then you will be willing to take on those who would rubbish you, and your values.

That is Jesus' real point. Your real **worth** before God is a more powerful force, than your real fear of all your oppressors. That is why Jeremiah and Jesus and all the Christian martyrs can face their persecutors with awesome courage. They all know that their true **worth** can never be killed. God's everlasting love is the only offer they can't refuse.

What our Lord said to the Apostles, applies to all Christians in the practice of their faith. Today the Lord is asking each one of us to be a fearless apostle. By living our faith openly and fully we are Apostles by example. Above all, **if** we have true love of God, and show our appreciation for all that he has done for us. And if we prove that love, by helping our neighbours, we are the light in the shining darkness, because we are helping others to see the true meaning of the Christian religion.

Do not fear what will be thought of you. If you object to obscene language in your workplace, or if you say grace before and after meals in public restaurant and hotel, or don't take that extra drink because your companions will ridicule your control. These acts and many others like them, may seem trivial to some, but they are giving testimony to the faith that is in us. Those who scoff at such things at first, may begin later to look into their own hearts, and come to realise what it is to be a person of principle. Eventually they may become persons of principle themselves.

Let us remember our Lord's promise, "***So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.***"

Now back to the prophet Jeremiah. When I started reading the Bible fully forty years ago, I began with the Book of the prophet Jeremiah and it was the Revised English Bible that I read. In Chapter One I remembered these words and have never forgotten them, "***Brace yourself, Jeremiah, stand up and speak to them. Tell them everything I bid you, when you confront them do not let your spirit break or I shall break you before their eyes.***".

A month later, I was sitting on a train leaving Plymouth station, with just a single ticket to Leeds, no money, no food and a spare set of clothes. My brief was survive by preaching the Gospel. The rest of the story I have already told you before.

So let us remember what Jesus says, "***Have no fear of them.***"