

Homily
12th Sunday OT - A

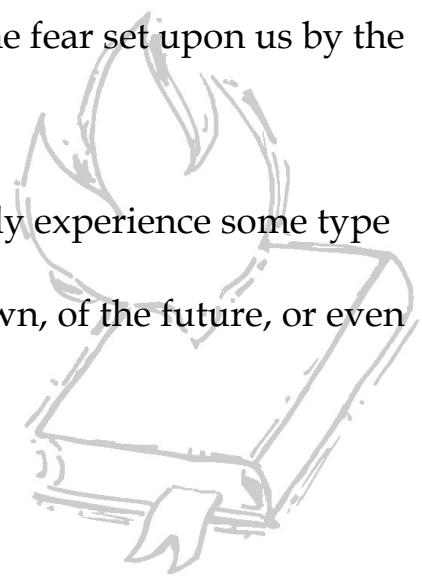
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski
June 20-21, 2020

Jer 20: 10-13
Ps 69: 8-10, 14, 17, 33-35
Rom 5: 12-15
Mt 10: 26-33

This week it took two infirmed Marys to relieve me of my fear...

When I read about the theme of weekend's scripture readings last Monday, I started to think about how fear plays a role in my life. The fact is that fear is an unavoidable condition that besets all of us in life and, in the life of faith, is a very necessary condition. In its negative connotation, Webster's dictionary defines fear as an apprehensive disposition; in its position connotation, the Catechism of the Church calls fear a disposition of reverential awe before God. The purpose of my homily today is to show how this fear and reverential awe of the Lord becomes the key component to alleviate the fear set upon us by the world in which we live.

Because of my human state in life, I constantly experience some type of negative fear, whether it is that of the unknown, of the future, or even



of death itself. In our human world, many individuals will tell us that our success in life is predicated on the ability to conquer the negative fears that beset us. Others will tell us that this condition of negative fear can never be conquered and that our success in life is predicated on controlling it.

When I thought about the two Marys in my prayer life this week, I started reflecting on their ability to accept and embrace this type of negative fear for the sake of their salvation and my ability to follow their example by embracing this fear myself.

One Mary I encountered in 2001; the other Mary I encountered about ten years later. Both suffered from the sickness of multiple sclerosis, a condition that debilitates parts of the spinal cord and prohibits the brain to communicate with the spine, thus rendering parts of the body inoperative. For a good deal of time, both Marys have suffered from this condition and both were resigned to the fact that they would not be able to walk. Both were resigned to the fact that they needed another to assist them for the rest of their lives. And in both cases, both Marys asked me

if I would bring them communion so that they could receive the grace of God in their lives.

I knew that neither Mary acquired this condition through any fault on their own. When kids ask me why God would permit anyone to be sick or to die, I try to explain to them the context of what we read in our second reading today, that our human race *chose* to live in this world of sickness, violence and death when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the first chapter of Genesis. When Adam and Eve chose to disobey our Lord, they chose to live away from the life of perfection. Adam and Eve chose to live in the same imperfect world in which we now live. Because of this condition, the two Marys in this world both suffer this great injustice by acquiring a disease by no fault of their own.

Whenever I visited these two Marys throughout these last ten years, I often thought about how both suffered so unjustly and yet interacted with me with such a great smile on their respective faces. I was thinking to myself this week how, with the kind of life these two ladies had to endure, either of them could smile at all. I thought about the suffering

each had to endure and whether they were angry with God, or afraid, or feeling a sense of desperation. And yet, because both had such great faith, they turned away from the one man who caused this life of fear and turned to the other who conquered the fear on the cross. And because of this new Adam, both Marys realized that the key to salvation was to realize that their faith in the new Adam of the New Testament cast away the fears of the old Adam from the Old Testament.

As I got to know each of the two ladies, what amazed me about both was their perpetually cheerful condition, considering that both suffered from multiple sclerosis for quite a long time. I started to reflect to myself that both women resigned themselves to their woeful condition of bodily health but were not deprived of their spiritual health. This is important to me; this is a condition that all of us must accept for us to enter the kingdom of heaven.

To assist my cause, I reflected on the life of another woman in this history of our faith who also suffered illnesses throughout her life and, like the two Marys, resigned herself to her bodily illness but never

resigned her faith life in God. The woman on whom I reflected was St. Teresa of Avila (d. 1582), the great Carmelite mystic who lived during the time of St. John of the Cross. In 1970, Mother Church bestowed on her the title of “Doctor,” a title given only to three women in the history of the faith (along with St. Catherine of Siena and St. Thérèse of Lisieux). This is the woman who wrote the great Spanish Taizé prayer that we often sing at the Spanish Masses throughout the world:

*Nada te turbe, nada te espante
Quien a Dios tiene nada me falta
Nada te turbe, nada te espante
Sólo Dios basta.*

*Let nothing upset you, let nothing startle you.
Where God is, I will not fail For God alone is
enough.*

Like the lives of the two Marys I described, St. Teresa grew up in a life of ill health, which caused her great suffering throughout her time on earth. As she grew older, St. Teresa saw this illness not as a cause for suffering or fear, but rather as a condition of enlightenment. For Teresa,

her suffering made her realize that her body was susceptible to the ways of the world, so she dedicated her soul to the ways of God through a life of contemplation. Through this cause, St. Teresa became such a great spiritual and mystical figure in the Church that the faithful of Spain from the 16th Century and beyond looked to her writings as a source of hope during their own lives of suffering.

Throughout her illnesses and pitfalls, St. Teresa kept a great sense of humor. A story is told on her behalf about a meeting she had with an important bishop of the time and the travels that took her to this meeting. As she reached the end of her journey to this important meeting, St. Teresa dismounted her horse and, in the process, fell into a puddle of mud, upon which she raised her eyes to heaven and said, "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few." This was St. Teresa's relationship with God, which was seen by the faithful as a very approachable and loving one.

In her writings, St. Teresa spoke of this negative fear as something important in her life, to remind herself that without God, this negative

fear would overcome her and her sickness would defeat her. St. Teresa realized that the positive Fear of the Lord could overcome the negative fear of human nature and with the help of God, nothing would trouble her and nothing would harm her. From the 41st Chapter of her great writing called The Way to Perfection, St. Teresa summarizes very well the life of faith that she strived to lead. She writes,

...You see that, with these two things -- love and fear of God -- we can travel along this road in peace and quietness, and not think at every step that we can see some pitfall, and that we shall never reach our goal. Yet we cannot be sure of reaching it, so fear will always lead the way, and then we shall not grow careless, for, as long as we live, we must never feel completely safe or we shall be in great danger. And that was our Teacher's meaning when at the end of this prayer He said these words to His Father, knowing how necessary they were: "But deliver us from evil. Amen."

Ven aquí cómo con estas dos cosas – amor y temor de Dios – podemos ir por este camino sosegados y quietos, aunque, como el temor ha de ir siempre delante, no descuidados; que esta seguridad no la hemos de tener mientras vivimos, porque sería gran peligro. Y así lo entendió nuestro Enseñador cuando en el fin de esta oración dice a su Padre estas palabras, como quien entendió bien eran menester: "Y Líbranos del mal. Amén."

Through her constantly imploring of the Lord to lead her from evil, to lead her from fear, St. Teresa established the kind of foundation that I believe the two Marys achieved to live within their own lives. They all chose the right kind of fear to which they wished to adhere and found salvation in their lives as a result.

May we realize that the words of St. Teresa become a rallying cry for those of us in today's age to overcome the negative fears that constantly fall upon us. May we embrace this great poem of St. Teresa of Avila as the means to answer the Lord's call in today's gospel from St. Matthew – do not be afraid; you are worth more than sparrows or anything else in the world. For with God, nothing will hurt you and nothing will startle you. For where God is, we cannot fail – *God is enough*. This is our prayer.