

FEARS AND FATHERS

Our readings today are from the Book of Job, Paul's Second Letter to the Church at Corinth and from the Gospel of Saint Mark. Each speaks about fear in some form. Job experienced fear in the things that happened to him after he had grown prosperous and blessed with children and family. He experienced loss, tragedy, suffering, and even tasted despair. Job believed that he had done nothing to deserve any of this, as if it was God who was inflicting all of this pain upon him. Job cries out in anguish and fear. God's response is to let Job know that God knows all that is going on, God is not bashing Job because of his sins, God has made all that is and God loves Job. God chooses to embrace Job and bless him anew.

Saint Paul the apostle who was once known as Saul of Tarsus who persecuted any and all who believed that Jesus was the Messiah had his life turned upside down and undergoes a great moment of transformation on the Road to Damascus in Syria. Jesus appears to him and Paul is baptized and then becomes the great preacher of the Gospel, the founder of many churches and one who will suffer mightily for the very faith he once persecuted. He knew shame for what he had done. And guilt. But Paul asks the Lord to break these old chains and banish the deepest fears in his heart because of his past failures and sins.

Jesus and the apostles are crossing the Sea of Galilee. It is late and the wind has come up and a storm engulfs the little fleet of fishing boats. They are taking on water. They are afraid their boat will capsize and they will drown in the waters. Jesus is asleep in the stern. They waken him in full throated fear and call upon him to help them. Jesus calms the wind and the storm immediately. His power over the powerful forces of nature reduce them to silent awe. Who is this who can do this? They are very much afraid.

My friends, fear comes to visit us in various ways. Fear of loss or suffering. Fear of past sin and shame. Fear of physical danger or emotional strife. It is God, the Living God who vanquishes these fears—any of them, all of them. But we must turn to Him and we must ask for God's assistance. Today is Father's Day and my focus is on those who are fathers. Back in 2008 during the Great Recession I wrote a Pastoral letter to each family in the parish. It was three pages long. In it I spoke specifically to the role of the father in the family. I would like to quote a section from that letter.

It is the man, the husband, the father, who must become the listener for the voice of God in his own life and in his family's life. It is the man who must assume the role of man of prayer who listens for the voice and direction of the Lord. Each family needs a man of prayer in it who listens for "Whatever Jesus tells" us. Each family needs one who will make the necessary sacrifices, turn off the television, mute the powerful pull of sports, not allow the workplace to dominate and dare to draw close to Christ in silence and prayer.

What is the spirit in your home? In your family? What can it be with the grace of God? Is there too much self-absorption? Too many fears? Too much anger? Too much

lack of consideration? Perhaps your answer to all of the above is “Yes.” Go back and look again. Is there not also faithfulness and perseverance and forgiveness? Does not our Father, the God of the second chance and the third chance abide there? Is sacrifice not a daily component of your family? Is there not an openness to God and God’s grace? Is there not prayer to the Father?

But is there daily prayer? Is there family prayer? Is there sufficient prayer? Is there prayer from the heart?

I find it greatly consoling that the Mary of the wedding feast of Cana and the Mary of the apparitions through the centuries speak the same message. “Do whatever He tells you.” She has stayed on message for twenty centuries. The reason is that the message is authentic and true; the message gives life. The message makes a difference for the better. And if we begin to take the message seriously then we too will begin to change. Fears are addressed and the begin to dissipate. That change will begin the slow and gradual transformation that will change our family members, making our families better. The same with our community, our parish, our church and ultimately our world. All of that because we are listening for the voice and heeding what we are told. His love casts out fear.

For me, as Pastor, I believe that the key lies in the hands of our men. It is time for our men to lead—not by word alone but by example, by being men of the Eucharist for their families, by becoming men of listening prayer for their families. Having been the Pastor here for a number of years, I have come to know personally so many of you men here. You are equal to this task. Step up to it. Do not be afraid to take on this role. It is rightfully yours. Your initial steps may well be tentative or even awkward. There will no doubt be missteps. You may even have tried before and failed. Stay with the task. The Spirit you need is already within you. Call on that Holy Spirit for guidance and enlightenment. Come to Mass. Bring your families to Mass.

There is some urgency to this. You only have this family, these moments. The time may seem longer than it actually is. When this earthly life is over our freedom and self-determination are sealed in death. What is to be sealed is now in your gift and God’s grace. Act now. Dare to believe. Dare to trust. Dare to hope. Dare to love. Dare to pray. Your prayer will reorder priorities; it will lead you to confidence and trust in Christ and you will not be afraid—of anything.

We have to step up and assume the mantle laid upon our shoulders. It is time. For our God, and for our families, may we be bold. Let them know you love them. Lead by example. May your words only encourage and not beat down. May your faith in Christ enable you to do the Father’s will in your homes as your gift to the Father for all you have received.

May the Lord bless all our fathers this day and give us his peace.