

12th Sun A - June 24 – 25, 2017

01. Jer 20:10 – 13; 02. Rom 5:12 – 15; 03. Mt 10: 26 – 33

My Sister and brothers,

‘Do not fear’ is a word of comfort, confidence and support. My memory goes back to my childhood days. I have heard these words ‘Do not fear’ from my father as a small boy. They always gave me confidence and courage. These words lift a person from discouragement to encouragement, helps a person to move from fear to face things with courage.

In today’s gospel Jesus uses these words ‘Do not fear’ three times. This is one of God’s favorite words. When angel **Gabriel** came from God to announce the message of Annunciation, he said to Mary, “Do not be afraid, Mary” (Lk 1:30). Jesus used these words to strengthen the apostles who were terrified to see Jesus walk on water. These words always bring about courage and confidence.

Early Christians began their life of faith during severe persecution. They were constantly battled between their life and their faith in Christ. Often, they were left with a choice between their life or their faith. I always wondered why the Lord allowed such a severe persecution at the very beginning of Christianity. God knows and he does it. The history of Christianity is a history of martyrdom.

St. Tertullian rightly said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

If the church stands today amidst what is going on, it’s because it had a solid group of men, women and children who courageously died for their faith in Christ. They valued their faith to their life. **St. Tertullian** says again, “Christians are made, not born.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus says, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 10:28). Faith is an assurance, an assurance of hope based on the word of Christ

who has conquered death. He who does not know Christ lives for the world, but you who know him live for eternity.

St. Lawrence ((c. 225 – August 10, 258), a Roman deacon who assisted Pope St. Sixtus II, oversaw giving help to the poor and the needy. When the persecution broke out, **Pope St. Sixtus II** was condemned to death. As he was led to the execution, Lawrence followed him weeping, “**Father, where are you going without your deacon?**” “**I am not leaving you, my son,**” answered the **Pope**, “**in three days you will follow me.**” The prefect of Rome, a greedy Pagan, thought the church had a great fortune hidden away. So, he ordered Lawrence to bring the Church’s treasure to him. The saint said he would in three days. Then he went through the city and gathered together all the poor and the sick people supported by the Church. When he showed them to the prefect, he said, “This is the Church’s treasure.” In great anger, the Prefect condemned Lawrence to a slow, cruel death. The saint was tied on top of an iron grill over a slow fire that roasted his flesh little by little, but Lawrence was burning with so much love of God that he almost did not feel the flames. In fact, God gave him so much strength and joy that he even joked. “Turn me over,” he said to the judge, “I’m done on this side!” And just before he died, he said, “It’s cooked enough now.”

Jesus said in the gospel of Mark 8:35, “**Those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it**” (Mk 8:35). Christians believe in Christ and in every word that he has spoken. Together with the psalmist, every Christian would say, “**Lord, your word is a lamp to my feet**” (Ps. 119:105). The First reading from the book of Prophet Jeremiah reflects the sufferings of the believer. Jeremiah experienced the dangers posed by his friends and family. He trusted in the power of God while he faced opposition for his prophetic ministry. He said, “**The Lord is with me, like a mighty champion**” (Jer 20:11). Faith is a gift of God. It must be accepted. It grows into maturity in people who live a holiness of life. You are meant to be saints. There is no compromise on it.

St. Augustine says, “Before you receive Jesus Christ, you should remove from your heart all worldly attachments which you know to be displeasing to Him.”

Learn to value your faith to your life. By your unshakable faith, you are intimately connected with Christ, and through him to eternal life in heaven.

God bless