

3rd Sunday after Pentecost - A

(Genesis 21:8-21; Ps 86:1-10, 16-17; Romans 6:1-11; Matthew 10:24-39)

Good morning to you all on this beautiful morning. We are now day 87 of the lockdown with no real end in sight. I feel that for most of us, we have been going through a roller-coaster of emotions, times when we feel good and confident and then times when we are fearful of the future, of what might happen to us, our family and those whom we care for and the turmoil of the rest of the world as well as the immense suffering of so many people. The psychologists and psychiatrists warn of people suffering degrees of deep depression and anxiety. If you are experiencing such emotions, be reassured this is common.

Fear can be negative, destructive but also positive. In the gospel reading, Jesus speaks to His disciples about the cost of being a disciple and we learn of the disciple's fear of persecution when they were encouraged by Jesus to go out into a hostile world and preach the Good News of truth and salvation. Jesus tries to allay their fears, telling them *"not to be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul"*⁽²⁸⁾. I am sure that we are in a similar state of mind of concern regarding the risks of contracting the Coronavirus. In these times we tend to doubt ourselves and allow thoughts and mind videos to fill our heads with pessimistic and negative scenarios that go around and around in our minds, feeding our fears.

The gospel message this morning tells us otherwise. Jesus tells us to have confidence in God. Jesus assured His disciples that God knew every detail of their lives – *"every hair on your head has been counted"*⁽³¹⁾ (I am sure that it would not take the Lord very long to count the hairs on my head!). Jesus goes on to say He would support them in every crisis. If the Father watches over and cares for the intimate details of the life of a sparrow, how much more will He watch over His children, you and me. We sometimes tend to forget the tremendous worth that God holds for each one of us, a worthiness that led Jesus to die on the cross that we might have life eternal.

The psalm this morning, psalm 86, is a psalm of lament and in a way echoes many of our prayers at this time, words which have formed the basis of a *Taizé* song - *"O Lord hear my prayer and let my cry come unto you"*. The psalmist goes on to praise the wonders of Almighty God, believing that all things are possible to God.

In the first reading this morning, we are reminded of the love and care of God for all people. In this story we see the difficulty that Abraham is faced with the love he has for both Ishmael and Isaac, his sons, and the obvious jealousy that Sarah has in being concerned that Ishmael might usurp the inheritance promised to her own son, Isaac, and as a result, wants Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away. This distressed Abraham because it was his son, and he was forced to make a decision, but God assured Abraham that Ishmael would not be neglected but rather that God would make a nation of him, because he too was a son of Abraham. When Hagar runs out of water in the desert and leaves her son Ishmael to die, God in His compassion, hears the baby cry and directs Hagar to a well where she finds water. The writer goes on to mention that God was with the boy when he grew up. Just as God travels with us throughout our life's journey even when we don't always realise or acknowledge His presence.

We should not allow fear to cripple us. In the beginning, I mentioned that fear can be negative and destructive, clouding our abilities to think clearly, and drawing us into a state of doubting God and ourselves. However we need to realise that sometimes fear can be beneficial and have a protective function, as it warns us of danger and prompts us to take certain actions. In this case, fear is a grace We have recently

celebrated the feasts of the Trinity, Pentecost and Corpus Christi, feasts which remind and assure us of God's abiding presence in our lives through Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There is another fear to consider and a far more important fear - and that is our **fear of God** as mentioned in Proverbs, "*The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom*" (9:10). The fear of God is to hold Him in awe, reverence adoration, honor, worship, confidence, thankfulness and love, and within this intimate relationship, the fear of disappointing, displeasing or offending God. Pope Francis talks about the fear of God as, "a joyful awareness of God's grandeur and a grateful realisation that only in Him do our hearts find true peace".

The gospel passage this morning forms part of the 'Apostles discourse' or instructions that Jesus gives to His disciples before sending them out to confess that He is the promised Messiah. We may not be enthused to boldly go out and preach the Good News, but as Christians we need to stand up for justice and righteousness when people are wronged, especially in our attitudes to others and not deny the teachings and power of Christ in our behaviour and witnessing to those around us.

Jesus told His disciples three times in this passage, "Do not be afraid," and when He said this, He was not saying that they should never feel afraid. Jesus knows that at times we will be afraid, but as with His disciples, He is encouraging us to move beyond fear by having complete trust in God who watches over us with minute care and concern. In Him are our hopes, strength, joy and the inner peace that passes all our understanding.

May our Lord keep you in the awareness of His Holy Presence this week and keep you safe and loved.

God bless
Fr John