**Sun June 25, 2023: <u>Do not be afraid</u>.**

**What are you afraid of? What am I afraid of? Losing** your life, or your wealth? Or your social status? Your affection for others? Your health? Your power and your influence? Your reputation and good name? Are you afraid that others will judge you, and talk about you? What are you afraid of? Or losing your relationship with God?

The first reading tells us how the prophet Jeremiah trusted in the power of God in the midst of all the fears of terrors, denunciations, and opposition to his prophetic ministry. He was intimidated by attacks upon his character, but he was not afraid to speak out in the name of the Lord. "***<u>But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion</u>***". That is someone who truly trusted in God.

The psalmist in today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 69) trusts in God when he is misunderstood and ill-treated even by his brothers and relatives. In the second reading, St Paul assures the Christians in Rome that they need not be afraid of opposition because they share in the death of Jesus and are united with Christ, the new Adam, in his Resurrection.

In the gospel (Matt 10: 26-33), Jesus prepares his disciples for the coming persecutions and hostilities in their lives. Three times in this passage, Christ tells them, "Do not be afraid". Then further he said, "***<u>And 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</u>***". (Matt 10: 28). Anything that destroys our body (and these are real, they can kill) is like a paper tiger. However, the soul is the center of our deepest connection with God, whatever destroys that, has really "killed us".

In the great film <u>A Man of All Seasons</u>, King Henry VIII is infinitely frustrated because he cannot manipulate his chancellor - Thomas More. The King wants his chancellor to approve his illegitimate second marriage and to sanction his authority over the Church of England. But his usual methods don't work, precisely because Thomas More is not afraid of the king. In time, Henry VIII takes away Thomas More's job, status, money, reputation, friends, family, and freedom – each time hoping that he will give in – until finally, the King takes away his life. Everyone else he could intimidate, but Thomas More. And Thomas More's last words are instructive: "I die his majesty's good servant, but God's first." Thomas More did fear someone. He had that holy fear that the Bible speaks of often: ***<u>the fear of the Lord</u>***. There was something he feared losing – and that was intimacy and friendship with God.

St John Paul II: Young Karol (who will become St John Paul II) whose university studies were interrupted when Nazi Germany invaded his nation, Poland in 1939. They closed education venues and suppressed his seminary training. This young man saw the worst of the world. The Nazis killed thousands of people, including the intelligentsia of Poland, and forced him and his classmates underground. After that came the Communist government, two oppressive regimes one following the other. Talk about those who kill the body, the young Karol Wojtyla experienced it all.

In order to remain in the country, Karol was forced to work in a stone quarry as well as night shifts at the Solvay chemical plant. During this time, Karol suffered the loss of his father, who died of a heart attack on February 18, 1941. In 1944, he miraculously survived being hit by a German truck. Through all this, he recounts the maturing of his vocation and the formation of his priestly identity.

Cardinal Wojtyła was elected Pope on October 16, 1978, and took the name John Paul II. He was the 263rd Pope and was the Pope for nearly 27 years. His Inaugural Address at St. Peter's Square, October 22, 1978, was: **"Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors for Christ**". Pope St John Paul II was repeating the words of Christ.

**Conclusion**: Jesus said that God is aware of everything that happens even to sparrows, and you are far more valuable to God than they are. You are so valuable that God sends His Only Son to die for you (John 3:16). Because God places such value on you, you need never fear personal threats or difficult trials. These can't shake God's love or dislodge his Spirit from within you. The real test of value is how well something holds up (endures) under the wear, tear, and stress of everyday life. Those who stand up for Christ in spite of their troubles, truly have lasting value and will receive great rewards in heaven (5: 11,12).

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