

HOMILY for 12th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

A woman driving down the freeway in an SUV got so mad at the man in front of her who was driving the speed limit that she pulled up alongside him, honked her horn, screamed obscenities at him, gave him the finger, and waved a pistol. And then the blue lights behind her flashed; and the police pulled her over & arrested her & took her to the station, fingerprinted her, & put her in a cell. After a couple of hours, the policeman came & apologized. He said, "I'm very sorry, Madam. You see, when I saw you do that, I noticed the Bush-Cheney bumper sticker & the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker & the chrome-plated fish emblem, & I assumed you had stolen the car!"

That is not the only tough situation that the people of God have to deal with on the street & be careful about how they should behave every day. Otherwise, they would scandalize their Catholic/Christian faith & be called a hypocrite. At home, they encounter all kinds of resistance as they try to rally the whole family to attend church often & be like Jesus. At work, they run into more opposition from people who might have viewpoints different from the Catholic Church. In the world, they might see all sorts of mocking & derision from the public for being Catholic/Christian. They feel being attacked & ridiculed for their Catholic/Christian faith. Their bad experience is well described in this Sunday's First Reading as following, "...Yes, I hear the whisperings of many: 'Terror on every side! Denounce! Let us denounce him!' All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. 'Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, & take our vengeance on him.'" Evidently prophet Jeremiah had to endure rejection & vengeance from the public like the people of God have. His message was denounced & rejected. We could only imagine how sad & dejected they must have felt.

However, prophet Jeremiah put his faith & hope in God & trusted that the Lord would defend him from all his enemies & evil acts. Once again, this Sunday's First Reading tells us how the Lord came to the aid of the prophet as following, "...But, the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble; they will not triumph. In their failure, they will be put to utter shame, to lasting & unforgettable confusion... For He has rescued the life of the poor from the power of the wicked!" So, the Lord was with prophet Jeremiah during his trial time & rescued him from the wicked. The Lord put them to shame & confusion with His mighty power. Similarly, the Lord would protect us from the wicked & rescue us from our enemies. We should not be worried or feel threatened for being Catholic/Christian. We should not let the world or our enemies intimidate us & keep us from following Jesus & our Catholic/Christian way of life. Instead, we must put our trust & hope in the Lord as prophet Jeremiah did. For the Lord will keep us safe & watch over us.

In case we have any doubt about the Lord & His care for us, this Sunday's Gospel reminds us about what Jesus said to His disciples: "Do not let people intimidate you... What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who deprive the body of life but cannot destroy the soul. Rather, fear him who can destroy both body & soul in Gehenna... As for you, every hair of your head has been counted; so do not be afraid of anything. You are worth more than an entire flock of sparrows." So, Jesus wants us to keep on proclaiming His Good News & telling the world about Him. He reminds us not to let the public intimidate us & threaten us from following Him & our Catholic/Christian way of life. For Jesus loves us & cares for the whole Creation. He would never

abandon us & let us suffer under the wicked hands of the world. Besides, those bad folks might be able to torture our bodies. But, they cannot destroy the soul. If there is someone whom we should be afraid of, it would be the Lord Jesus. For He has power over not only our bodies but also our souls. That is the one we should obey & be afraid of.

As you might have known, I travelled to Seattle, WA this last weekend to do a funeral for a family member of mine. I was able to gather with some of my relatives to reminisce about our challenging life under the Communist system. These evil folks tried various ways to ban public gathering in church, to confiscate all of our possessions which we had had to work so hard for, & then turn those into their own. They took over church properties, seminaries, convents, personal possessions, & so on. Additionally, the Communists wanted to turn the currencies of South Viet Nam into the one of North Viet Nam by making us exchange twice. The old currencies were devalued so much that they were worth nothing. I recalled that my family would use the old currencies for firewood & help us cook many meals for several weeks. We basically lost everything we worked hard for all of our lives. We did not know how our lives would be like or how our next day would turn out. In those dark nights of the soul, many of us have turned to God & asked God to guide & help us. If we did not do that, or if we had turned to the world or a different god, I wonder how our lives would be like. God sure took great care of many South Vietnamese in those challenging times & eventually helped us make it to the land of freedom & rebuild our lives here in the USA. We are certainly worth more than an entire flock of sparrows in God's eyes. God definitely loves us & cares for us.

My dear brothers & sisters, we surely will continue to encounter all kinds of challenges in the future. But, our Lord will be there to guide & help us. We will run into all sorts of resistance at home, at work, & in the world because we would like to hold high the Cross of Jesus & follow our Catholic/Christian way of life. But, our Lord promises to be there to protect us & encourages us to keep on preaching His Good News. So, don't be worried & afraid of any worldly threats. Rather, be loyal to the Lord & afraid of Him only!