

12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of the Year (A)  
(Jeremiah 20:10-13 / Matthew 10:26-33)  
21.06.2026  
*Fears & Trust*

Today in our Gospel reading, twice, we heard Jesus say to each one of us: “Do not be afraid.” In the Bible, in both Old and New Testaments, these words are like a refrain. Over and over again, we are told: “Do not be afraid.” Why does God deem it so necessary to put us on our guard against fear?

The first thing that needs to be clarified is that I do not think that Jesus does not want us to feel fear. That would be inhumane. Jesus does not expect us to be like stones. Jesus wants us to be fully human and fear is an emotion that we must experience in order to deal with the world in a balanced way. What the Lord means when he says: “Do not be afraid” is that we must be careful about the way we deal with our fears, what decisions we make and how we behave as a consequence of our fears. So the problem is not the emotion in itself but what we do with it, how it impacts on our lives.

The Lord knows that, when we are afraid, instead of relying on him and placing our trust in him, the great temptation for us is to panic and rely on our own strength, to lose sight of what is really happening and to take things into our hands.

Unfortunately, unchecked fears will lead us to look for simple answers to complex questions, black and white discourses on thorny human ethical issues, scapegoats who can become easy targets. The racism that we saw erupt into violence in Belfast two weeks ago fed on fears that were neither intelligently discerned nor seriously challenged. Unchecked fears always lead to violence and injustice.

Scripture tells us, and the Spirit whispers in our hearts again and again, “Do not be afraid.” The one who puts his or her trust in God can say: “Though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me” (Ps 23:4).

When God enters into a relationship with us, he always places us in relationship with all others; fears, by contrast, demand all our attention and set us against one another.

This is true of ideologies that polarize and divide people who hold differing opinions; and it is also true among our Churches when they harden boundaries in order to assert orthodoxy or spheres of influence.

We have to remember that, in Gethsemane, Jesus took upon himself all our fears. In perfect obedience to the Father, he carried them; he assumed our fears in a perfect act of love (cf. 1 Jn 4:18). Thus, on Good Friday, fear itself was redeemed. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews states clearly what was at stake in the death of Jesus: he died in order to “free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (Heb 2:14–15). This is why the first gift of the Risen Lord is a word that frees us from fear: “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:10). We must remain vigilant so as not to fall back into the slavery of fear, not only the fear of death, but also the fear of being alive, fully alive.

This is exactly what our two readings warn us about: like the prophet Jeremiah, we must commit our lives to him who is on our side, who probes with justice and scrutinises the loins and hearts so that we may live.

For us to stand firm on the sure ground of God’s unconditional and faithful love does not mean that life will be like a long quiet stream, without storms and struggles. In the Gospel,

Jesus is quite clear that the sparrow is in God's mind even when it falls to the ground. As Julian of Norwich reminds us: "Both when we fall and when we get up again, we are kept in the same precious love. (...) Never once does that dear eye of love and pity cease to regard us, nor his mercy fail." (*Revelations*, n. 82, 48)

When life is tough, when we feel betrayed and lonely, when we get bad news about the health of a loved one, when we are afraid of death which lurks in the dark, when we are overwhelmed by mixed feelings of love and anger towards the same person, when violence and wars destroy the present and darken the future, then the choice is ours: either we allow fears to drive us where we do not want to go or we turn to the Lord and trust that, as he promised, he is always with us (cf. Mt 28:20).

In our first reading Jeremiah ends by saying: "Sing to the Lord, praise the Lord, for he has delivered the soul of the needy, from the hands of evil men." In fact the first enemy the Lord has to defeat is not evil people around us. The first enemy is within, it is our forgetfulness of God's promise, our doubts about his presence at our side, and our fears of suffering. These thoughts and emotions are powerful, and we cannot make them disappear on our own. What we need is to remember that to feel fear is an opportunity for us to choose over and over again to trust, to cling to the Lord because, as Julian of Norwich declares: "He did not say, 'you will never have a rough passage, you will never be over-strained, you will never feel uncomfortable', but he did say, 'you will never be overcome.' God wants us to pay attention to these words, so as to trust him always with strong confidence, through thick and thin. For he loves us." (*Id.*, n. 68)

If we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord then we will never be overcome. If on occasion our vision is a bit unfocused, that does not make the Lord absent because he loves us and keeps his eyes fixed on us; if our vision is not always as sharp as it could be that does not make the Lord less powerful because he is able to reach out to us through the Sacraments and through the brothers and sisters who journey with us.

The words addressed to the prophet Jeremiah apply to each of us: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5). In the story of our faith, before we did or said anything, the Father took the initiative, the initiative of love. We trust in God, and we are secure in him, because, as Saint John wrote, "he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).