

Two Kinds of Fear Seventh Week in Ordinary Time Monday, February 20, 2017
8:15 AM **Sir 1:1-10; Mk 9:14-29** (Without prayer there is no discernment; without discernment, who knows what to do?)

“O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I endure you?”

There were times when **Jesus seems very angry and put out**. And mind you, he is not angry with his disciples; he’s angry with the crowd. He is even angry with the father. Now **why** is this?

Apparently his view is that they are pretending to be helpless, but they really aren’t. **They are pretending there’s nothing they can do, but there is something they can do, because this kind of evil can be expelled through prayer, but they weren’t praying.** They were postulating. They were emoting. They were fearing. They were grieving. They were doing everything, but they were not praying. Even the disciples weren’t praying. They were commanding. And there are times when evil yields to commands. There are times when goodwill overcomes bad will. And that can be properly discerned by people who are prayerful. But **without prayer there is no discernment; without discernment, who knows what to do?** And when no one knows what to do and when there is no discernment, then **what takes over is negative emotions, principally of course fear.**

Now the Book of Sirach, which is the first reading today, says: **“Fear of the Lord is glory and beauty.”** The fear the Lord is not the same thing as fear in this context. In fact, fear can be the greatest evil or it can be the beginning of wisdom, **depending upon what kind of fear.**

Now it seems to me there are **people in our world today whose entire goal is to create more fear.** People in high levels of politics, people in the media seems to go out of their way to create fear, surely never to quell it. **That kind of fear is bad.** That kind of fear paralyzes. That

kind of fear is darkness. **And people in the grip of that kind of fear, as in the story, don't resort to prayer.**

But as Jesus put in another context: **“Fear is useless; what is needed is trust.”** And what he found lacking here is trust. **Trust is an act of the will.** It's a commitment. It's a desire **to connect with and depend upon God.** It's not wishful thinking. It's an act of the will to reach out, to depend on God, and to open oneself to God's power. And that process is aided by prayer; in fact, **prayer is absolutely necessary for this process to continue very long.** Sometimes people have experiences, as it were, out of the blue, but experiences out of the blue are never permanent. **Only prayer makes permanent a relationship of growth with God.** Fear tries to stop this. Fear tries to push it away. You could say fear is a “mute and deaf spirit,” and it does great harm. But we can drive it out, and that's the point of this story.