

Following the Prince of Peace Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A June 25, 2015
10:00 AM Jer 20:10-13; Rom 5:12-15; **Mt 10:26-33** (Christians are called on to wage peace, to protect the vulnerable, to confront evil, but to do it the way Jesus did it: anchored in God and using only methods nonviolent and peaceful.)

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Fear no one.’”

This is a very challenging teaching in the New Testament because **fear is a constant companion in our lives**. In fact, fear of the unknown is actually one of the basic building blocks of religion. Jesus wanted to make it very clear that **we have nothing to fear from God**, and he reveals this utterly merciful, infinitely kind, and compassionate Father, Daddy, that we have nothing to fear. **But here he goes beyond that and he says, “Fear no one.”**

We might be tempted to think this is rather naive. We might be tempted to think that this is just wishful thinking, that we really couldn’t live without fear because, after all, **we do have enemies and there are people in this world who intend us harm**. And to ignore this would be blatantly stupid. So is Jesus recommending that we act stupidly, that we bury our heads in the sand? Not exactly. What he is **encouraging us is to rise above our normal, natural, instinctive reactions to become intentional disciples of the Prince of Peace**. And this is a great work that he is encouraging us to engage in. It is work; **it is the work of transforming who we are**.

Now one of the relevant issues today is what is called in the newspapers and on television Islamophobia; people like to talk about Islamophobia, fear of Islam. Many people confuse it with hatred of Muslims. It is not. People may use the word that way, but it’s incorrect. **Islamophobia is the fear of the teachings and practices of Islam**, the very things that energize this peculiar type of faith. To be brief, and I don’t want to get into lurid details, **the holy book of Islam teaches that God gave the prophet a set of laws governing all matters of social, moral, religious, and political life**. There is no distinction between religious and civil. There is no distinction between sacred and profane. It’s all one fabric, all dictated by God, supposedly, and **the prophet told his followers to enforce this law**, not on themselves alone, but **on everybody**. Now orthodox Jews say that God gave them a law, but it only applies to them. This is not the case with the so-called sharia. It applies to everybody, and this is the source of grave concern by many people, including people who have left that particular belief system. So that’s what we are talking about. [Now this strict interpretation does not apply to all Muslims, naturally, but it does exist in the world.]

In this very situation, however, **Jesus’ own life is mirrored because he lived in a world that threatened his life**. Every day he was threatened because of who he was and what he said, what he did. He threatened people’s set ideas. He threatened systems. He threatened people in authority. And so now **he is teaching how to deal with this** because if we don’t deal with it, it will deal with us. First of all, he does not say that if we simply believe, God will descend from on high and protect us from peril. He never said that. Many Christians seem to think this and are dismayed when bad things happen to good people and express utter shock and literally disbelief when bad things happen to good people. But Jesus’ own life is a perfect example of how **bad things happen all the time to good people**. We have to be clear about this.

The reason for this is that on earth today **the kingdom of God is not reigning**. In fact it is the mission of Jesus and his disciples to **establish the reign of God on earth, but we have not yet done this**. It's a long, hard journey. But we have to be very clear **we cannot establish the reign of God using the means that the world uses** to establish anything. Money and power don't work. Force won't work. This is the problem of many Christians in the past, for example the Crusades. The Crusades were an attempt to establish the kingdom of God in the Holy Land, but they used armies and weapons. You cannot establish the kingdom of God with armies and weapons. When we use fire to fight fire, we get burned. **Jesus' whole perspective is that life in this world isn't worth living if it turns us into violent, ungodly people**. It's not worth it. Not only that, but life in this world is not all of life. It's just a tip of an iceberg. **Life itself is an infinite, eternal, and unimaginatively beautiful reality that we are being invited into**. That's what life on earth is about; it's about an invitation to life with God. But meanwhile we can turn life into something horrible, something mean, something terrifying and really hellish. And people are doing this all the time. They are doing it right now in various parts of the world, turning life into hell. It is what we can do because we are free.

So he adds: **“And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”** We know what to kill the body means, but what does it mean to kill the soul? What did he mean by that? How does a soul die? What happens to kill a soul? That's something I cannot explain in so many words, but you need to think about. **What kills a soul? Christians are called on to wage peace, to protect the vulnerable, to confront evil, but to do it the way Jesus did it: anchored in God and using only methods nonviolent, peaceful, because Jesus is the Prince of Peace and he is our master**. If we are to follow him, we have to follow his ways. If we look at human history, we can see that not so long ago peaceful solidarity defeated what Ronald Reagan called the “evil empire,” the Soviet Union. And if peaceful solidarity can defeat the Soviet Union, then what can it not do? **That's our work, to find what peaceful solidarity can do in the world**. And we need to have the patience and determination to complete the work that Jesus himself began.