

The 12^t Sunday in Ordinary time

“You will be hated by all men on account of my name” (Mt. 10: 22). Those are the words of Jesus Christ directed to the Twelve Apostles in the Gospel of today. This statement was among the many guidelines Jesus gave to his disciples as he prepared them for their future missionary work of witnessing to him for all that Jesus stands for as far as our salvation is concerned. Speaking about this same witnessing, St. Paul addressed Timothy the Bishop by saying, “You are well aware that anybody who tries to live in devotion to Christ is certain to be attacked (2Tim. 3: 12). This is bound to be so because persecution is the result of the clash between good and evil, between God and the devil. And it will come to us from every corner: from members of the same family, from family of faith community, from friends, from enemies, from those far from God and from those who seem to be close to him. So, watch out!

Therefore, witnessing to Christ is not the concern only of the apostles but of every Christian of all times and places. Not everyone is called to leave his home and go to remote regions to announce the Gospel, but we are all called to witness where ever we find ourselves: at home and outside home, within the Christian community and in front of non-believers. There is no moment in life when we are dispensed of this obligation. In fact, whether we like it or not, at any given moment in our life, our life will be one of these two things: either a witnessing or a counter-witnessing; either a confession or a denial of Christ. It is in these situations that it is revealed whether we are afraid or courageous in the face of threats or persecutions. Whether by our life-style or the preaching of the Gospel, it behooves us to see that the Gospel of Christ is not kept hidden because of indifference or fear. It is our sacred duty to see that we put this Gospel of Jesus on a stand so that people may see its light and give praise to the heavenly Father. If this is to happen, witnesses are needed, i.e. people who are not afraid or even ashamed to be seen to be followers of Christ out there in the midst of a sceptical and sometimes hostile world.

It is not uncommon to find people show signs of fear or shy away from expressing their faith especially in public, even when there is no imminent danger to their lives. This is a very sad situation and even worse than a real threat to one’s own life in a situation of witnessing to one’s faith in Christ. Sometimes, witnessing can demand from us to stand on the side of truth without fear or favor, other times it could mean having a legitimate duty to carry out, but have obstacles or opposition preventing that to happen. The question will be, do we still hold on that duty with patience and diligence, which Christian obligation imposes on us, as we wait on the Lord, or do we hastily abandon or avoid it completely because we don’t want to be a victim. However, fear is not necessarily a bad thing because it can warn us of a present danger. But fear can be a handicap. It can make cowards of us. Fear is the enemy of faith. All those who have accomplished great things have had to overcome fear. In the first reading, Jeremiah is a typical example. He lived out his vocation during a time of great turmoil, which saw the defeat of Israel and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. He lived with constant threats to his life. Yet, in spite of everything he remained faithful to his mission. What was the secret? It was the conviction that God was on his side.

Jesus Christ knew the fears of the Apostles, and they were legitimate fears. So, not once but three times, he said to them, “Do not be afraid”. In order to be able to overcome their fears, Jesus urged them to have complete trust in God. God knows every detail of our lives. So, Jesus reminded them that if God

the Father watches over the life and death of the smallest and least valuable creatures, how much more will he watch over his children in all their trials. It means, therefore, that there is no reason for us to be discouraged or afraid, because Jesus is never so close to us as when we are persecuted, ready at all times to strengthen and to defend us. And he does so in his own mysterious ways.