

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2020A

“Fear no one,” Jesus says. Not long after, he nuances this command: Fear only the one who can destroy the soul along with the body. Soul killing may sound esoteric, but it’s pretty common nowadays. At times it feels like someone has murdered the soul of our country while no one was looking. We are a nation shuddering in an environmental soup of crisis. We live in fear that’s stoked by every news crawl, renewed with each banner headline. And as Pope Francis points out, fear makes us cruel. The pope says fear is what drives a community to build walls, deny the other, and abandon the poor. What are we so afraid of—we who are arguably one of the most beautiful and secure nations on earth—that we should surrender our better natures?

The list of what folks around us live in dread of is long, starting with the uncertainties of this season of pandemic. Asian Americans fear being blamed for a suspected conspiracy of global sickness. Whites are always afraid of what blacks may do, and vice versa. The undocumented worker fears the citizen, just as the citizen blames the newcomer for his misfortunes. Native Americans fear the destruction of land and water, the desecration of Mother Earth, which they hold to be their primary stewardship. Muslims (and those mistaken for Muslims because of their foreign-seeming dress or speech) are wary of sudden violence, or exclusion from the Canadian story altogether. Blue-collar workers are hostile to professionals who appear to denigrate their contribution or forget them altogether. Business and church both fear government, with its power to legislate away their values. In fact, anyone who doesn’t fit a 19th-century definition of “belonging” on the Canadian landscape has reason to suspect his or her safety is in doubt.

In recent years, nearly all of us have been in conversations that end badly, because of our deep divisions. There may be family members we don’t talk to, friends who don’t receive even a virtual welcome. Faith-filled

Catholics report how tired they are from carrying an anxiety that shifts from the back burner to the front with every news report. We're reminded that Jesus not only says, "Fear no one," but elsewhere he declares, "Fear is useless" (Luke 8:50). To which he appends the important dictum: "What is needed is faith."

The anxieties of the present are real. But every act of generosity we extend robs them of their authority. Virtues like love, kindness, and inclusion defeat the power of fear that seeks to kill the soul. The mandate to protect the common good, which assures everyone gets what they need even in a time of scarcer resources, heals division and clears the path toward a more gracious future. If what is needed is faith, then, O Lord, increase our faith! Let's recall too that faith isn't about believing certain things. It's about trusting in the God who believes in us enough to entrust the welfare of our neighbor into our care.

Deacon Gerry

