

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Do not be afraid

The Sundays following the end of the Easter Season are marked by the great feasts of Pentecost, Trinity and Corpus Christi, but with no feast this Sunday one could be forgiven for feeling a sense of climb down and wanting everyday to be a feast day. And yet, in a sense, every day is a feast day. Life is governed by routine; there are 'highs' and 'lows'! However, if the dawn is announced each day by the joyful chorus of the birds singing, why do we often respond on a low 'yet another day'. When we proclaim the greatness of God and acknowledge His wondrous gift of life each morning, we begin the day on the right note, even if it is a challenging and difficult day ahead.

This Sunday is an appointed 'Day of Prayer for Life'. To be Pro Life, which we are and must be as Christians, is not just to promote the wonderful and sacred nature of life at its very beginning and the rights of the unborn. It is to promote the sanctity of life at every stage. Those who have fought to preserve life in the ongoing Covid 19 pandemic, especially in hospitals and Care Homes, deserve our unqualified admiration and appreciation.

However, there is a deeper value to life than just the bodily dimension of our existence. In the Gospel Reading for mass this Sunday Jesus says to us, some three times, *Do not be afraid*. These are comforting words, indeed, but also challenging words for they invite us to place all our trust and confidence in God no matter what is happening in our lives and in the world. Often, we are unable to answer and comprehend the 'why' in the question 'Why do things happen?', but in everything we can place our trust in God our loving and heavenly Father who, alone, knows the answer to those questions we cannot answer.

Fear, of course, is a very real thing. That goes without saying. The word *phobia* comes from the Greek language and we find it in the negated form in Jesus' imperative *Do not be afraid*. Our own St. Thomas More, whose feast day we celebrate on Monday, June 22nd, with Bishop John Fisher, struggled against his own fears after his fall from the King's favour and incarceration in the Tower of London, for refusing the Oath of Supremacy by which Henry usurped the spiritual governance of the Church for the State. Thomas More even wrote a major work, a Tower Work as they are known, *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, in which he contends with his own fears. In a letter from the Tower of London to his eldest daughter, Meg, More reflected in a truly Gospel spirit, the words of our Lord *Do not be afraid*. This is what he wrote,

Nothing can come but that which God wills. And I make myself very sure that whatever that be, seem it never so bad in sight, it shall indeed be best.

Such is the trust of the saints in the providence of God, and in the case of Thomas More, an outstanding married lay saint and father of four children. Once again, there is a deeper value to life than just the bodily dimension of our existence. The voice of conscience speaks and, rightly informed, is God speaking within. Thomas More did not doubt the true voice of conscience and made the fundamental and defining choice, *God first*. He was true to God and to himself and so realised in his act of witness in the martyrdom the words of Christ which we hear in today's Gospel.

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul

Fr. Anthony