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Today, Jesus invites us not to fear. It is the tune of this Gospel: three times, he says to his disciples: do not fear. And this is part of his speech on the mission, the whole chapter 10 of Matthew. Jesus sends the disciples to proclaim the Good News. It is exciting but also it raises fears of all kinds. It is normal when we face the unknown. We understand the disciples and also the prophet Jeremiah (1st reading) confronting hostility. How to face the challenge of mission with confidence and audacity?

Do not fear. First, we have to recognize the fears that paralyze our mission in our societies, in our communities, and inside ourselves. Fear of the others who do not look like us, so different, and the confusion of identities. Fear of the debates and conflicts that the plurality of options and visions provoke in the Church and in our society: how in this context can we be witnesses of our faith and hope? And with the pandemic of covid-19, simply the fear of anybody coming near us, breaking the saving distance. This is special and terrible: in the last months, we have experienced the fear of any other human being, our fellows. Let us hope we will be able to cross these boundaries, temporarily needed.

There is also the fear of changes and the uncertain future, and as much the fear of the continuities and the heaviness of traditions. Fear of the powerful people and their loud voices who may bury our projects and expectations, but also fear of the weak ones and their silent cries, who may threaten our safe order. Fear of getting out of ourselves and losing our name and identity in the open air and the animated streets. Fear of our own frailties as well as of our creative rushes. Yes, there is much to be afraid of, just like the disciples were when Jesus sent them for the mission. Which fears, personally, touch me more?

Do not be afraid, says Jesus This is possible only if we change the way we look at ourselves, as Jesus calls his disciples to. Sometimes, we see ourselves as interchangeable pawns, manipulated by forces of fatality, or as beings without much value finally, and our word and action have no impact. Or we see ourselves as invincible warriors, protected by our thin masks and our shields of arguments. But we are just and greatly human beings, created in the image of the living and relational God. And as human subjects, we have some consistency, not made of stone and steel but of body and soul, in their unique unity.



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In my youth, I went a few times to Combermere in Ontario, where there was a community of women and men, living together under the guidance of the baroness of Hueck, Catherine Doherty, a passionate spiritual leader, Russian-born. This community was dedicated to prayer, simple lifestyle and service of the poor (cf. Madonna House). Its spirituality was influenced by the Russian tradition. There were many icons in the house. One was special and I remember it. There was a mirror, and written under it: Icon of God. To recognize our fears and to go beyond them, we need to see ourselves as we are seen by the living God. And this is why we need one another to remind us of who we truly are: images, icons of God.

To develop courage for the mission, Jesus tells his disciples that their deep identity is linked with their relationship to our Father in heaven who cares for each of us, as much and more than for the sparrows. A caring Father or Mother; and today is Father's day, after Mother's day in May. In the eyes of our Father, for Jesus, we are not numbers, inanimate objects, but living and unique creatures. Even the hairs of our head are all counted. For some, it does not take much time to count them! Seeing ourselves as we are seen by the merciful God will also help us to look at the others differently, and not necessarily as threatening or strangers.

Do not fear. The mission is not easy. It takes many forms. Words and deeds that heal or defy, sounds and silences that express sufferings and liberations, works and groups that promote human dignity and friendship. And through all that, voices and gestures that reveal the amazing mystery at the source of all being. When we trust the word and the call of Jesus, we still remain frail but we may dare to proclaim the Good News, so that our world become more liveable, our Church more evangelical and ourselves more faithful to who we are and become.

When the Gospel is proclaimed, with and beyond our fears, something happens. It may reach dry deserts waiting for a living water, dark undergrounds waiting for light, painful bodies waiting for resurrection. Why should we keep prisoner of our fears a Word made for circulating in the open air and the animated streets? So many people today, through and beyond their own fears, are searching for this Good News of goodness, newness, and friendship. And these are constitutive of our humanity and its vocation.

In this Eucharist, let us give thanks for the mission we receive and its challenges; and especially today, for the fathers who care for their children, whatever their age. Let us give thanks for the free gift that we receive, as saint Paul reminds us (2nd reading), through the humanity of Jesus Christ, the one man, the new Adam, with us and within us, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Amen.

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