

12TH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A – 25 JUNE 2023

- Every Hair on Your Head Has Been Counted -

Today's gospel is certainly good news – and not just for those of us who are getting a bit thin on top. 'You are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.' Jesus is making a very important point: All of us are valued by God.

Psychologists have spent the past fifty years emphasising the importance of having self-esteem. Thousands upon thousands of books have been written to help people to learn to value themselves and to think positively about themselves. Today's gospel is truly Good News because in it we learn that we don't need to spend a fortune in buying self-help books in order to feel better about ourselves. We just need to listen to the word of God and allow it to move from our heads to our hearts, and from our hearts to our hands and our feet. To live it as best we can.

St. Benedict in his rule goes to great pains to emphasise the worth and value of every human person, whatever their colour, creed, rank or background. In bold letters he wrote across the pages of history that everyone is sacred and each person has the right to developed to his or her full potential. That is one of the themes that first attracted me to the Benedictine life. Perhaps why that is one of the reasons all sorts of people are turning to Benedictine spirituality.

'Do not be afraid.' Jesus says those words three times in today's gospel.

We know that when we are afraid, we can easily lose all perspective. We can forget God. We experience all sorts of fear in our lives. There are those irrational fears that drive us to go to extraordinary lengths to protect ourselves from perceived harm.

Then there is the fear that comes from peer pressure, the fear of humiliation or rejection, fear of what other people might think. This sort of fear can block out God's command to speak the truth, to be honest, to be kind. What about the fear of loss of our jobs? Or the other financial worries that beset many people at the moment?

Yes – fear can be very destructive. It can lead us to fail to trust in God, and even to abandon him altogether.

Jesus tells us today: 'Do not be afraid.' Have courage – lead a life of committed faith. In our first reading we have a wonderful example of a person of courage – the prophet Jeremiah. He spoke out. He criticised the rich for exploiting the poor. He told people to stop worshipping false gods. He had courage because he truly believed that with the Lord at his side he could accomplish anything.

With God by our side we can face anything. God is larger than our fears.

In the Gospel today Jesus tells us that he will declare himself for those who declare themselves for him. Bearing witness to Jesus can have a profound effect on those around us.

It has been said that every Christian occupies some kind of pulpit and preaches some kind of sermon everyday – not necessarily by what they say but by what they do. And we know that actions speak louder than words. A friend of mine has a poster on his office wall which says: 'You are the only Gospel some people will ever read.' We need to reflect on that. What Gospel do I proclaim by the way I lead my life - but most of all we need to remember the words of Jesus today: 'Do not be afraid'