

Homily: 12th Sunday: Cycle A: 2023: Jer 20:10-13; Ps. 69; Rom 5:12-15; Mt 10:26-31

“Combating the tendency to give into Human Respect to the detriment of our Catholic Faith”

Part of the struggle of our fallen human nature is the weakness in all of us - to a greater or lesser degree, based upon our personality, family background, and other variables - is the desire to be liked by other people – even to the point sometimes of compromising our core principles, values, and Catholic training to the detriment of our soul and preventing us from effectively witnessing to others with the gift of our Catholic Faith pointing us to the truth of God leading to salvation.

1. The prophet Jeremiah is struggling with this dynamic in the 1st reading, as the ppl of Israel have turned on him because they don't like what he is saying to them, particularly about the need to change their behavior to follow God faithfully. **The call to repentance and conversion is never a popular one!** How often humans attack the messenger because they don't like the message. The **perpetual challenge** that all priests face throughout the ages is the Divine call to faithfully tell the flock of people entrusted to them by God: *what they need to hear from God's Holy Word for salvation vs. telling the people what they might want to hear*, and on the human level that will make the priest more “popular”, as fallen human nature doesn't like to be challenged, but rather told we all are just doing fine as we are and don't need to change anything. **But remember as disciples of Jesus we are called to a certain standard of conduct and inner transformation that the world and unconverted fallen human nature doesn't like.** We, both priests and lay faithful, must be willing to go against the grain of the world and fallen human nature - even when it brings on ridicule and rejection which none of us like. That is why the Holy Spirit gives us the spiritual gift of **fortitude** in our Baptism and Confirmation to help us be bold in our witness despite human opposition at times.
2. **The struggle again sin and human respect tie us together in a web of darkness.** As St. Paul points out in the 2nd reading today to the Romans, before Jesus came to earth, and taught us the truth and offered his life as a living sacrifice for the salvation of mankind and then gave us the Catholic Church as the Ark of Salvation, we were all in the darkness; none of us could go to Heaven. All the just souls from Adam onward were waiting to be released from Shaol or the place of the dead – the waiting room of Heaven

as one Saint called it. This is the “Hell” we reference in the Apostles’ Creed - it is not the place of the damned (**Gehenna** that Jesus references in the Gospel today), but the place of the just dead before the Gates of Heaven were opened by Jesus’s Salvific Death and Resurrection. Unfortunately, in English we don’t have different words for the Hell of the damned (Gehenna) vs. the Place of the dead (Shaol) like they do in the original Greek, Latin, and Hebrew/Aramaic of the NT and early Church when the Creed was formulated.

3. Finally, in the Gospel passage today, **Jesus gives us a very serious warning about the spiritual trap of human respect** - that we need to always be concerned about what our Heavenly Father thinks of us – not what other people think! *Fear not the ones who can kill your body but not your soul; fear rather the One who can send both body and soul to **Gehenna** (Hell).* Of course, if we are concerned about what our Heavenly Father thinks (e.g., *not receiving Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin, taking time out of summer vacation to attend Holy Mass, speaking up on topics of Faith and Morals when ppl mock the Faith or attribute things to the Faith that are not true, e.g., saying you can support abortion and still be a good Catholic, etc.*), we will be striving for holiness (e.g. *loving Mass & prayer and going to Confession regularly*), and so will set a good example for other human beings, esp. the young, and so then - ***everything truly does work together for the good of those who love God*** (Romans 8). God’s Providence is always looking out for our good. Never forget that! God’s loves us beyond our imagining and so will do everything in His power to save us - but will we respond in kind with our freedom? **Will it be one of love for God & neighbor** - keeping His Commandments, even when it involves serious sacrifices on our part? **Or will it be one of ongoing selfishness** - doing what I want to do apart from God? Which the world, our fallen nature and the devil says is “fine, modern, with it, tolerant and nice” – but not really! May the Lord in His grace through the prayers of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Michael, our Guardian Angel and all the angels and saints help us to strive to please God, always walking on the narrow path leading to true life - and not on the downward spiral of human respect which leads to spiritual mediocrity at best and destruction at worst. **Humility** is essential to growing in God’s life. Cultivate devotion to **the Sacred Heart of Jesus** which teaches us this Humility of heart, rather than the Pride the world holds up every June. Quite a contrast!✠