

Homily: 23rd Sunday: 2021: Cycle B: Is 35:4-7; Ps. 146; James 2:1-5; Mk 7: 31-37

“Paralyzing Fear vs. Living in God’s Peace”

The prophet Isaiah today tells us, *Thus says the Lord: say to those whose hearts are frightened: Be strong; fear not! Here is your God, He comes with vindication; with divine recompense He comes to save you.* The gift of fortitude which we first received in our Baptism and then is deepened in our Confirmation is given to help us overcome our fears.

1. **Is all fear bad?** No. If you look up the definition in the dictionary fear is 1. A feeling of alarm or disquiet caused by an awareness or expectation of danger. 2. A feeling of dread caused by anxiety or terror. This emotion is **good** if one is about to be run over by a truck on a busy road; or right now to be careful concerning the Covid. But it is **not good** if this emotion takes over our life, which has happened to far too many people during this pandemic, and as a result some people are afraid to even leave their house, and are afraid or mad at God, others, or even themselves, in essence one becomes paralyzed by fear and can’t function very well at all. This type of fear needs to be contrasted with another gift of the Holy Spirit that we receive in Baptism and Confirmation, namely the gift of **“the fear of the Lord.”** *This is the spiritual gift that enables us to have a deep reverence for God and the things of God, and makes us realize that God is in charge, not us; and some day at death we will have to give an account of our life to the Lord.*
2. **However what causes the bad fear, the paralyzing fear, to take over in our life?** Well keep in mind at times we don’t have much control over some of this, like the Covid pandemic or if someone suffers from various types of mental and emotional illness, either because of genetic make-up or because someone was traumatized in life, then this is a **cross** that the Lord will help us to bear, and hopefully we will find some relief through medicine and counseling and love from others. But much of the paralyzing fear in our lives comes from one source: namely **SIN** in all its various forms as Jesus laid out in last Sunday’s Gospel (Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23). When we sin it damages (venial) or destroys (mortal) us: in our relationship with God, others and ourselves. We should feel the pangs of our conscience after we deliberately commit a sin, which either then leads to

repentance: *by telling God right away we are sorry and going to the Sacrament of Confession or we resist that call and over time our conscience becomes “numb” and yet we feel an ongoing sense of dread and it even may lead us to avoid or even hate God because we see Him as a threat to our selfish “happiness.”* This is **“the Adam and Eve dynamic”** because if you look at what happened after the first human beings sinned – *they tried to hide themselves from God, literally, and had a fear and a dread of the Lord’s Presence; when prior to sinning they loved being with the Lord and “walked with Him.”* In our life the same thing can happen, and it is often seen in our image of God in our mind and heart. **How do we view the Lord?** Do we see Him as a **“harsh taskmaster”** who is always taking notes of all the bad things that we do and is going to get us in due time? Or do we see God as a **“big softie”** who loves us no matter what we do and doesn’t care about good and evil? Both of those are serious distortions of who God really is! The true image of God is seen in **the Divine Mercy Picture** with the red ray symbolizing God’s mercy and the white His holiness. He is all loving, all holy, all good, and because of that He calls us to the same reality: *to take responsibility and accountability for our life and actions by letting the Lord in grace mold us more and more into the image of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.* He wants us to live the Truth, shown to us through our Catholic faith, in obedient love. But we can’t do it on our own - we need His ongoing help.

3. **Yes, we need a savior!** Jesus is the One who will remove our spiritual deafness to the Truth and enable us to live in His peace rather than fear. God gives all of us moments of “spiritual visitation”, as the saints call it, where He intervenes directly in our life to get us more on the path of holiness. These visits usually come in the wake of tragedy and suffering, for those are the things that most wake us up to spiritual reality. **We need to pray this ongoing mysterious pandemic will be a spiritual wake-up call for many.** May we today ask Jesus to show us at least one thing where we are deaf to His truth and beg Him to heal us just as He healed the deaf man in the Gospel - so we can live in His **peace** rather than in **paralyzing fear**, and ask Him to **visit** our souls to transform them in holiness. God bless you.