

There is a story told by a bishop in Vietnam. It is a true story written by a lady who is in this story. She wrote that, after the revolution in Russia in 1917, Christians suffered greatly from persecutions; they were not allowed to go to church; Priests could not practice their ministries. And she continues with a very moving question, “How can we live without the Mass? How can we live without the Sacraments?” She continues “That’s the reason why, even-though we were afraid, we still secretly came to church, where the priest also celebrated Mass secretly.”

And then it happened one morning while the priest was reverently celebrating the Mass with the assembly, the moment he said the blessings and raised the host high for us to venerate, suddenly a door opened, a group of military men entered, and their leader said loudly “freeze!”. The priest stood still with his hands holding the host. Then the leader pulled out a gun and pointed right at the priest and shot him. The priest collapsed immediately. And the large host dropped from his hands, rolling from the altar to near the rail where people come to receive Communion. A frightening atmosphere covered the whole church. Then the leader walked over to the host on the floor. He stepped on it. He not only stepped on it, but also trampled on it again and again. And he shouted loudly, “there is no God here. Look at it! We are trampling on your God.” At that moment, people heard a soft prayer from an old man in the assembly: “Lord, please forgive them, even though they know what they are doing.”

After that, the military men left. Then, an old man of the assembly reverently gathered the crumbs of the host on the floor and put them on a paten. He distributed to each person a small portion considering it was the last time they would receive Communion.

The author wrote that, this incident happened right before Christmas. That Christmas became a Christmas without priests; a Christmas without Mass; a Christmas without Eucharist; a Christmas without communion.

And, she said, “I will always remember that Mass as a blessing, because since that day I have realized that no matter what happens, deep in my heart I know that God is always present in me.

This story is so touching that I wanted to share it with you today. Because the assembly and the priest experienced what Jesus says, in the Gospel: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” So, the people in the story, even when they encountered persecution and were afraid, they still went to church secretly because deep in their hearts they experienced that the love of God was still within them something much bigger, much stronger, much more powerful than their fear.

Likewise, Jeremiah, the author of the first reading, experienced the power of God in him. Jeremiah was by nature sensitive, meek and shy; however, he was sent by God to pronounce God’s judgment upon the people for their wickedness. And because he criticized and condemned their worship to pagan gods, people considered him as a terror and tried to denounce him. There were moments when he was so discouraged and afraid that he spoke like this: “Cursed be the day on which I was born! May the day my mother gave me birth

never be blessed.” On the one hand, he feared, but on the other hand, he also confessed that: if “I will no longer speak in his name... then it is as if fire is burning in my heart. I cannot stand it.” In his heart, there was something bigger than his fear something bigger than his discouragement that helped him continue his vocation.

In our lives, absolutely, we have moments when we fear. Fear of failure, fear of uncertainty, fear of illness, fear of past sins and death, just to name a few. But, at the same time, we also experience that inside of us, there is something much bigger much stronger and much more powerful than our fear that helps us continue our lives.

Deep in our heart, we always have the love of God. The God that Jesus reveals to us today in the Gospel. The God who is our Father who cares for us, whether we notice or not. Jesus tells us that God, our Father knows when sparrows fall to the ground and when sparrows die, that nothing escapes the father’s care, concern, and love. Jesus reminds us that all life is sacred; that every person is sacred because everyone is created in the image of God.

So, we condemn the sin of racism because Jesus tells us that God cares for everyone. He cares about every human being, regardless of race or color. He cares for the black, the white, the red, the brown, and the yellow. All lives matter in the eyes of God.

This Sunday we celebrate Father’s Day. We thank God for the gift of our fathers. Many of us can remember moments from our childhood when we were afraid, our dad, or whoever played the role of dad in our life, embraced us in loving arms and made us feel safe. And even when he might not be with us physically, still his image or his teaching or his love always continues to strengthen us and give us peace and calm. For children, fathers always have the ability to quiet their fears and make them feel safe as they grow through the journey of life. So, thank you, all of you fathers who love, and care and sacrifice for your children. You are models for your children to follow. And what a wonderful blessing it is for you to be an image of God for your children.

My brothers and sisters, We are God’s children. The love of God, our Father is always bigger and stronger than anything in this world. May we know it and feel it and trust it in our lives.

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