

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

GOSPEL

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Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the housetops.

'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

'So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

(Matthew 10:26-33)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- Sparrows were sold in market places as inexpensive food for the poor and were a symbol of something of minimal value.
- Members of the church who have died rather than renounce their faith are called martyrs. The word *martyr* literally means 'witness'. Throughout history, many have given their lives for the faith, and in our own time, people are still martyred because they will not swerve from their commitment to Christ.
- By the time Matthew wrote his gospel, the church was already undergoing persecution in some areas, and Christian faith was being sorely tested.

EXPLORING THE WORD

The people of Matthew's community were being persecuted for their faith. They were mostly Jews who had come to accept Jesus as the awaited Messiah. But not all Jews accepted this, and they did not want the Christians to worship with them in the synagogues, so the Jewish Christians were expelled. Matthew's Christian community was feeling very vulnerable and trying to find a new way of living their faith outside the traditional Jewish practices. In this passage, Matthew comforts them and assures them that they need not fear physical harm, for God knows every hair of their heads and will protect them. Those who are strong in their faith and refuse to recant will be honoured before God. If God extends his care to the sparrows,

the cheapest life available, how much more will he extend his care to his faithful people?

- Jesus wants to form a community in which each individual is valued. In what ways do you experience God's individual care and concern?
- How does your parish reflect God's individual care and concern?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Share stories of people who have 'the strength of their convictions'. What does this mean?
- Has there ever been a time when you have had to go against prevailing opinion to stick up for someone or to defend truth or justice? How did it feel? What was the outcome?
- What makes you afraid as you move towards committing yourself to Christ and his church?
- Do you avoid speaking about your journey to faith in case others may think you are 'odd'?
- 'Think of times when you may be tempted to deny Christ: by actions that do not reflect what you really believe; by silence when something really needs to be said; by failing to challenge an injustice. Try this week to witness publicly to your faith, even in simple ways, like saying grace before meals.
- Repeat this phrase often this week.
Do not be afraid; I am with you.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

In the early centuries of the church, many people were persecuted and even killed for confessing faith in Jesus Christ. Under the Roman Emperor Nero, the first persecution of Christians began in Rome. We all know the stories of believers being thrown to the lions! What is more surprising is that people are still being martyred for their faith today. In 2019, 29 Catholic pastoral care workers, including priests, nuns and lay people, were killed while performing their duties. In 2017 Pope Francis authorised the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree on the martyrdom of Sister Regina Maria Vattalil (nee Maria), professed nun of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Poor Clare's Franciscans, who was killed very publically in India on 25 February 1995. Sister Maria had been working with village women and poor farmers in providing social assistance and empowering them to seek civil rights in an area dominated by large landowners and moneylenders.

Sister Irene McCormack was an Australian member of the Sisters of St Joseph, working as a missionary in a poor mountain village in Peru. Her pride and joy in this work was a simple school room/library where she taught the village children to read and write. The area where the village was located was a dangerous region because of the presence of a Marxist guerilla group known as the 'Shining Path'. On the evening of 21 May 1991, the terrorists entered the village and accused Sr Irene of being a 'Yankee imperialist' and poisoning the minds of the children. They also disapproved of Irene's work of distributing food aid to the very poor. She and four local men were subjected to a sham trial in the village square, forced to lie on the ground and each was shot in the head.

Sr Irene took seriously the call of the Gospel to bring good news to the poor and to raise up the downtrodden. Her dedication cost Irene her life.

- You could tell the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero who spoke out boldly against injustice and was murdered for doing so.
• Tell other stories of people who were persecuted or killed for their faith. What can we learn from their example?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Jesus' words in this text are words of encouragement for the confused and fearful Christians of that time and all times. He speaks of a time when his teachings will be shouted from the rooftops and clear to all. Jesus reassures believers that their faith will be rewarded. They are precious to him and to the Father.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for group leaders to employ in connecting Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment

- Are there people who opposed your journey or made it difficult for you? Why might your journey have been a challenge for them?
• How can you witness to God's love and care for them through forgiveness and understanding?
• A picture of Sr Irene McCormack and a candle could form the focus of prayer this week. Pray for all those who are persecuted for their faith. Ask that all who journey in faith are strengthened by the faith of others. You could use the blessing in the RCIA at §97D. You could conclude with 'They'll know we are Christians' (As One Voice 130).

NOTES

Dotted lines for note-taking