

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Last ten Sundays, our Scripture readings called us to walk in faith, be men and women of hope, nurture a confident and trusting relationship with the Lord, have courage to face the challenges of following Jesus as his disciples, to listen to the voice of God, to go to a quiet place with the Lord, to show compassion in generous and sacrificial giving, to be strengthened by the bread of Life, to take Jesus in as our bread of life, to be disciples who are in a continuous process of transformation in Christ, to make wise choices, to choose God and God's way in Jesus, to give witness to our commitment to Christ as we go about doing our daily chores and fulfilling our responsibilities....

Today, we celebrate the twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time. In our first reading, we hear Isaiah of Jerusalem assuring the returning exiles that God blesses their return, and that they should be confident and unafraid. The Jews were returning to their homeland after decades of exile in Babylon. Their arrival causes great friction with other tribes already there, and so they have reason to be afraid. Isaiah says to those who are frightened and weighed down by their fears, "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God." He speaks of the eyes of the blind being opened, the ears of the deaf being cleared, the lame leaping like a stag, and the tongue of the mute singing when Israel returns home after the Babylonian Exile. The promised redemption is described in terms of health, healing, and well-being for the disabled. God will not only bring them home but also rehabilitate them.

"Be strong, fear not! Here is your God" is an ongoing challenge that was offered to Israel during their long history of salvation. It is said that the Bible uses the phrases, "fear not" or "be not afraid" and other similar expressions 365 times. The exact number is unimportant. What is important is to know that the Bible calls us to be unafraid because "Here is your God." It is faith in the nearness of our God that makes us unafraid. Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets, Mary, Joseph, Peter, Paul and all great men and women of the Bible heard this call to be strong and unafraid and they did and fulfilled their God-given mission.

You will remember the story of David and Goliath. David said to Goliath, the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands.....for the battle is the LORD's." The frightened Israelites found a new freedom because young man David was unafraid, and David was unafraid because he trusted in the Lord.

St. Peter inspires us to trust in the Lord during times of doubts and fears. Peter, like us, had his share of flaws and failings, often disappointing, once even denying, his friend and Lord. Jesus called him the rock. But the "Rock" showed no courage on that fateful day when his friend needed him most. Yet, he came back again and again to Jesus and in the end died in witness to his faith in and love for the Lord.

Once, Peter and the other disciples found themselves in a boat that was being violently tossed and buffeted by the strong winds and dangerous waves of a frightening storm. After hours of attempting in vain against strong headwinds to reach the far shore, suddenly they saw Jesus walking towards them on the waters. They thought they were seeing a ghost which only doubled the fear they were already experiencing from the dangerous storm. Jesus reassured them, saying, "Take heart... it is I... have no fear."

Peter immediately asked the Lord to let him come to him on the troubled waters. As long as he kept his eyes focused on Jesus, Peter walked on those troubled waters. But as soon as he took stock of the violent storm all about him, he began to drown and, cry out in ear, "Lord, save me." Jesus reached out to grab hold of his friend's outstretched hand and brought him safely into the boat. The winds ceased and the waters immediately became calm. Jesus then chided his friend for his imperfect trust in him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Like Peter, we must cry out our fears, "Lord save me," no matter how storm-tossed our lives may at times be. Jesus is with us in our troubled waters. If we but believe and trust in him, he will see us safely to the other shore. Jesus will always be our port, no matter how troubled the waters or how rough the journey that leads us there.

The Gospel reading of today's Mass (Mark 7:31-37) speaks of Jesus going into the district of Decapolis which was largely a gentile territory. Jesus' ministry was open to all, not just to the Jews. He was unafraid to open himself to people beyond Jewish circles.

St. Francis De Sales advises us: "Be at Peace. Do not look forward in fear to the changes of life; rather look to them with full hope as they arise. God, whose very own you are, will deliver you from out of them. He has kept you hitherto, and He will lead you safely through all things; and when you cannot stand it, God will bury you in his arms. Do not fear what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you then and every day. He will either shield you from suffering or will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace and put aside all anxious thoughts and imagination."

I encourage you to take a few minutes each day of this week to go to a quiet place, be still and reflect on the challenge that our Scripture readings offer us today, "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God." Take a few moments to pray for those who are afraid.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 8, 2024

**What does love look like?
It has the hands to help others.
It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy.
It has eyes to see misery and want.
It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men.
That is what love looks like.**

(St. Augustine)

Collect

O God, by whom we are redeemed and receive adoption,
look graciously upon your beloved sons and daughters,
that those who believe in Christ
may receive true freedom
and an everlasting inheritance.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

Forbearance is a mysterious mixture of mercy, sympathy, compassion, patience, endurance, forgiveness and strong will.

Isaiah 35:4-7

In this excerpt, we read about the Prophet's promise of healing, health, restoration, wholeness and transformation of a people who were broken, alienated and desperate. He shares with his people his vision of redemption in forms of health and wellbeing. He says to those who are frightened and weighed down by this world's struggles, "Be strong, fear not! Here is your God"....Salvation will be experienced as sight for the blind, hearing for the deaf, healing for the

lame, voice for the mute.....

Today, we live a world in which we need to hear these promises again. We need to hear and feel challenged by the promise of healing, health, peace, and wholeness.

Be strong! Fear not! Dream Peace! Think Peace! Speak Peace! Pray Peace! Love Peace! Be a peacemaker!

Psalm 146

The Psalmist calls us to praise God, not just for an hour in song.....but with the whole of our being at all times and in all places. Because as the last verse says. “the Lord reigns forever” and His reign can be trusted. To reign is to care - verses 8-9 proclaim this confidence. **God is a God who keeps “faith” forever - He is the living God.** Therefore, God is worthy of our trust. The Psalmist calls all people to do what God does and that is the way we are to praise God. We are to learn to be like Him and do what He does.

**The Lord gives sight to the blind;
The Lord raises up those who were bowed down.
The Lord loves the just;
The Lord protects the stranger.....**

James 2:1-5

James challenges us to a concern and compassion for others, which takes us beyond our prejudices. He tells us that the faith of those who believe in Jesus must be lived out and expressed in every aspect of life and not mere words. He says, “Be doers of the word and not hearers only” (1:22). This excerpt invites us to reach out to the less fortunate in the community. We are called to reach out to the poor and not show partiality to the rich.

Let your faith reach out to the less fortunate in your community. Be open to all people!

Mark 7:31-37

Jesus went into the district of Decapolis which was largely a gentile territory. Jesus’ ministry was open to all, not just to the Jews. This excerpt from Mark presents Jesus opening himself to people beyond Jewish circles.

Then we read about a man whom Jesus healed. People brought a deaf man to Jesus for healing. Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, touched him and healed him. The man who was opened and the people who witnessed the healing went about opening themselves and proclaiming the good news that they came to know, in spite of beings asked not to tell anyone about this experience.

Isaiah's vision of hope for a fragile and broken world is now fulfilled in Jesus. The deaf-mute is set free from his handicap, from his inability to hear and communicate. It is interesting to note that the words of Jesus to the man were "be opened" rather than "be healed" or "speak" or anything similar. Jesus "opened" the man and freed him. A door that was closed and sealed was now open for the man....he was free! When one door closes another opens!

It is also interesting to note that Jesus asked the people to keep the healing of the deaf man "closed", not to tell anyone. Sometimes, it is prudent to be closed. We are invited to discern how closed and open we need to be in different situations. In this situation Jesus did not want publicity, didn't want to draw attention to himself. The authorities were on the watch for anything to entrap him. It was the prudent thing to keep the matter quiet.

Be opened! Be opened to receive the good news and to proclaim the good news!

Be open to the Holy Spirit to help you discern how closed and open you need to be in different situations.

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

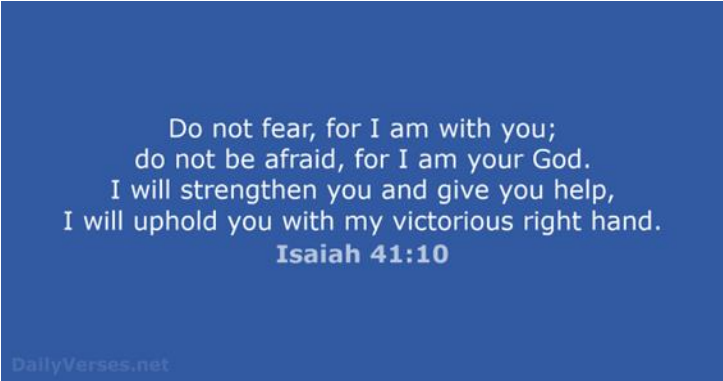
Saint of the day, September 8 - Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and 27 other saints are remembered this day

According to tradition, this feast probably began with the consecration of the basilica of St. Ann in Jerusalem. The September birth was chosen because the Eastern Church begins its Church year in September. The Birth has been assigned to September 8, both in the East and in the West, which is nine months after the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. The feast was brought to Rome toward the end of the 7th century by Eastern monks. Gradually, it spread to the other parts of the West.

Scripture does not give us an account of Mary's birth. However, according to the apocryphal Gospel of James, Anna and Joachim, the parents of Mary, were infertile but prayed for a child. They received the promise of a child who would advance God's plan of salvation for the world. Although it is not an actual birth day, it is a way of honoring the gentle and holy woman who said "yes" to God's call and let God's word of love become flesh in her and make a gift of the "word-made-flesh" to the world. It is also a challenge and an inspiration for us to welcome God's word of love into our hearts and let it transform our life. Let us make this a joyful day for us and a day of blessing and grace for all we meet.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

Religion is daily bread, not cake for special occasions.



Do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be afraid, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and give you help,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
Isaiah 41:10

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