

**Jer: 20:10-13; Romans 5:12-15; Mt. 10:26-33**

Last week I was looking through my bookshelf searching for a book I might want to re-read during this stay at home time. I found the novel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and the title gave me pause. I wondered what a sequel to that might be called today. I decided the title could be *Fear in the time of COVID* for certainly there is a great deal of fear right now. There is the obvious fear of catching this horrible virus; there is the financial fear that many are experiencing due to the loss of work. There is the fear some parents have that their children will never return to school. These, coupled with the fears tied to the civil unrest in our nation, certainly make the list of fears grow longer and longer.

Fear is not an emotion limited to our experience today, however. We hear the word “terror” in our first reading from Jeremiah. In today’s short Gospel passage, we hear Jesus speak the phrase “Do not fear” three times. Yet, the disciples were fearful. Even though just a few weeks ago on Pentecost we heard that the disciples were filled with the spirit and ready to go forth proclaiming the good news, today we read they are frightened. The early Christian communities were being persecuted, and some disciples were losing their willingness to continue in the face of this opposition. And what does Jesus tell them? Not only does he want them to continue to share the good news, but he wants them to “shout it from the roof tops”. He reminds them that, although they may be killed, it is better to lose their body than to lose their soul—by backing away from speaking and doing what is right. He assures them that they are not alone and that he loves every hair on their head. He ends by proclaiming that the kingdom of God belongs to those who follow Jesus way of living.

Better to lose your body than to lose your soul, Jesus says to these disciples, and he is saying it to us today. But, what is the soul and how do we lose it? When I was a child in catechism class I somehow came to believe that my soul was this little mass that was located somewhere in my body—I believed it was near my shoulder, under my skin, just below where my Guardian angel was perched. And if a doctor were to open up my body, she could pull out my soul, and I would still be OK. I no longer hold these beliefs. I believe our soul is the very core of who we are; it is our moral compass; it is the Holy Spirit of God living within us. It permeates our very being. As St. Augustine said, it represents true self. Our body is the shell that surrounds our soul. Our soul can’t be yanked from our bodies, but it can still be lost.

How do we lose our soul? The words of our St. Mary’s Family prayer offers us some clues. A piece of our soul is lost every time we fail to speak or act in the ways that Jesus proclaimed. It’s chipped away whenever we remain silent when we witness actions that speak against the kingdom. It is harmed when we, through our actions or inactions, allow racism, sexism, or unjust speech and actions by those in power to continue. We might ask ourselves:

- Have I ever remained silent when I heard a racist comment because I didn’t want to confront the person who shared it? Have I supported with my time or money individuals and organizations that work to end

discrimination? For those of us who are white, have we been willing to educate ourselves regarding how our white privilege has contributed to the systemic racism that exists in our country? How is my soul responding?

- Women in our country make 81 cents to every dollar in wages earned by men. This number is even less for women of color; one in four women in our country is sexually abused; 29% of women heads of households live in poverty. How is my soul responding to these?
- Leaders in positions of power in our nation and our church must speak and act in ways that benefit everyone, especially the most vulnerable and powerless. How does my soul respond when they don't?
  - What do I do when I see children put in cages because of where they were born?
  - How do I respond when funds for food to low-income families have been slashed?
  - What should I do when the use of military action is threatened against peaceful protesters?
  - How does my soul respond when I see women in my church being denied the ability to share their God given gifts as priests?
  - What should I do when our Bishop's latest pastoral letter tells us we must kneel at the Eucharistic prayer even though our standing acknowledges that we are one with the priest in offering our gifts to God?

Every day we are confronted with words and actions that call us to respond. Sometimes, we don't, either out of fear or fatigue or feeling overwhelmed, and a piece of our soul is chipped away. Other times we do stand with women, with children, with the powerless so that they might have life and live it to the full, and our soul is nurtured. We can't do everything, but we can all do something. I believe this is easier to do when we stand with a community who share our faith and our values. That is why we are blessed to come together in ways such as this to listen and to sing and to pray for ways to share the Good news that Jesus proclaimed. That is why we can be hopeful as we see countless examples from those in our community who are doing just that. People like Melinda Jankord-Steedman who has made over 200 masks to help keep Recovery Café Members, Migrant workers in the Skagit Valley, and women at the African Women's Coalition safe. Parishioners like Lizzie Olson who are bringing parents together to discuss how to talk with their children about racism. Parishioners like Jorge and Yolanda Quiroga who continually call us to march and stand for immigrant workers rights. Parishioners like Will Depusoy who are working to include ethnic studies for students at all grade levels. And the list goes on and on. If you are on Gallery view right now, you could look at the faces of everyone on the screen and know that every person you are seeing has done many things to promote the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed—the kingdom of equality and love, of justice and mercy.

In the week ahead, we might ask ourselves what is one thing I can do / one action I can take our world desperately needs.

- Maybe it's speaking out when I hear a racist, sexist, homophobic comment;
- If I'm a student and I see another student being teased, maybe it means I side with the person being teased and not with those doing the teasing;
- Maybe it means I support a local restaurant or business that is struggling to survive rather than buying at a big box store where I would probably pay less;
- Perhaps it means I will call or email Congress members and demand keeping the post office funded or insuring safe voting during this time of COVID.

**Let's take 20 seconds of quiet to think about once thing we can commit ourselves to in the week ahead that will nurture our soul and support the work that Jesus calls us to— remembering what Mother Teresa said, "One does not need to do great things; only small things with great love". A moment of quiet**

In these troubled times in which we are living, Jesus call us, like he called the disciples, to shout the good news from the rooftops. We're reminded that our God loves every hair on our head and the spirit of God is always with us, and we need not be afraid.