

## Some words for the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A

*'My God, accept my heart this day, and make it always thine,  
that I from thee no more may stray, no more from thee decline.'*<sup>1</sup>



### Readings:

*Jeremiah 20:10-13*

*Romans 5:12-15*

*Psalms 68:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35. R.v.14*

*Matthew 10:26-33*

Dear Parishioners of St Joseph's & St Charles,

The books of our bible are formed from over eight hundred thousand words. Inevitably, some of those words, verses or even passages of scripture will strike a particular and personal chord with each and every one of us. The images and meaning of some of those words will not only resonate however; they will remain with us, so that we begin to create a small mental library. Without much thought, we find that, as time has gone by, we have produced our own personal pocket-sized bible upon which we can draw, be it in time of joy or need, gratitude or grief. Much to our surprise perhaps, we discover that we have done what the Lord God has asked of us, and have *'Let these words of mine remain in your heart and in your soul.'*<sup>2</sup> Today's gospel includes such a verse for me and, despite its discomfort, it has

always persisted in my own personal biblical compendium; *'fear him rather who can kill both body and soul in hell.'*<sup>3</sup>

Our thoughts, however unpleasant or reprehensible at times, remain our own, and, despite the evident desire of some to the contrary, we can only be convicted and condemned by the evidence of our words and actions. Yes, it has long been a principle of law that, *'the internal consent of the mind is presumed to conform to the words or the signs used,'*<sup>4</sup> but even that essentially states that we only judge what can be judged and no more than that. For now at least, the forces that shaped and altered Winston's Smith mind in the novel, *1984* - inspired by the fascism and communism George Orwell had encountered - have not come to pass, and thankfully, our own thoughts still lay beyond any human power. The same is not though true of God for, as Jeremiah so memorably tells us in today's first reading, *'you, Lord of Hosts, you who probe with justice, who scrutinise the loins and heart.'*<sup>5</sup> Yet, despite God's ability to know and comprehend us beyond any other, and his power likewise to judge and condemn us, our readings today offer encouragement, not fear.

Facing *'Terror from every side,'*<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah can nonetheless, *'Sing to the Lord, [and] praise the Lord,'*<sup>7</sup> for, having committed his cause to God, his needy soul will be delivered *'from the hands of evil men.'*<sup>8</sup> In the responsorial psalm the psalmist's zeal for God's house has brought him taunts and shame, yet, confident in the Lord's compassion, he knows *'the Lord listens to the needy and does not spurn his servants in their chains.'*<sup>9</sup> The Fall brought the spread of sin and death, observes St Paul, and, even the Law of Moses could not end the reign of death, yet now it is *'certain that divine grace, coming through the one man, Jesus Christ, came to so many as an abundant free gift.'*<sup>10</sup>

Have you ever had an idea or a suggestion that you have shared with others and been surprised by how vehemently it was rejected? The disciples could see for themselves how things were going with Jesus and the opposition that he encountered. Likewise, their master evidently saw that there was a need to embolden and fortify his followers. Early in St John's Gospel, Jesus told the inquisitive Nicodemus, *'that though the light has come into the world men have shown they prefer darkness to light.'*<sup>11</sup> Now that the time has come to be a person of truth and to live by the light,<sup>12</sup> Jesus asks his disciples not to be afraid, *'For everything that is covered will now be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear.'*<sup>13</sup> Darkness and evil would be dispelled, and if the disciples were going to successfully preach the gospel in public, they were going to have to set aside their fears. A message that was to be offered to all, and not just to a select few or even many, would require all sorts of hardships and sacrifices that would always be seen and recognised by God,

no matter how weak or insignificant they looked to the world. Indeed, invite the light and shun the secrecy of darkness, Jesus tells his disciples; get onto *'the housetops'*<sup>14</sup> – a flat, one-storey platform easily accessible and visible to a crowd - and proclaim the truth.

There are limits to the power of the weapons that people can wield. Yes they can kill our bodies, and inevitably we will fear this fact, but our true fear, *awe* in fact, should be reserved for God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell says the Lord. Here hell is spoken of as *Gehenna*; the small valley, outside of the city, that acted as, Jerusalem's rubbish dump and where embers of burning refuse were ever present. That God is so truly awesome is demonstrated by his knowledge, which encompasses all the sparrows of the earth and the hairs on our head.

*'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,'*<sup>15</sup> Jesus reassures his disciples, and three times today he tells us not to be afraid. He is not threatening us, he merely wants us to realise that God will mirror our own behaviour; just as when we ask to be forgiven, *'as we forgive those who trespasses against us.'* Despite what your enemies might do to you, if you speak for me, I will speak to my Father for you, promises Jesus. Similarly, if we disown Jesus, he will disown us. It is important to note that it is fidelity, that virtue born of fortitude and perseverance that the Lord seeks, and not success in converting the hardened hearts of others. They, like us, will have to face judgement one day.

The current pattern of so much of our social discourse seems to be that some particular event suddenly emerges as the overriding issue of the moment and, that as opinion quickly coalesces around a certain point of view, all other schools of thought are rendered immediately invalid. No matter the weight or importance of the issue at hand the same sequence appears now with monotonous regularity and genuine and important debate quickly becomes stifled. I often marvel at our present culture where, at times, it appears that everything is permissible yet nothing is forgivable. We can all be guilty of shouting and not listening but we should always be cautious about seeking to empower some at the expense of others, no matter how stinging the wrong that we seek to right. I must confess that I mentally doff my cap to all those brave souls, many of whom I do not agree with, who are prepared to stand out against the full weight of the outrage generated by both the mainstream media and online communities of chatter. Whatever their political creed, all successful politicians and other seekers of change must either possess or develop a thick skin.

Sometimes our faith might be deemed socially awkward, embarrassing or inconvenient, while at others it may appear too difficult or demanding. Perhaps we simply wanted to avoid a row and so we acquiesced to something before we were even asked. We have all had moments when we have faltered and strived to perhaps avoid or hide the subject of our faith in the Lord. I chose today's picture above of *The Denial of Saint Peter* because, even though he disavowed the Lord three times on one night alone, we will still be celebrating his great feast day next Sunday. St Peter well understood the truth of today's psalm; that '*God-seeking hearts will revive; for the Lord listens to the needy.*'<sup>16</sup> Fidelity is not the same as perfection.

If Sherlock Holmes can construct a grand mind palace to lead him to the truth of a crime then the more humble, small mental library I spoke of earlier, is still more than sufficient for the Christian to reach a far greater truth. All we need do is draw on the library of God's word and believe in its power. No matter how insignificant or inadequate we may feel we should be more than reassured by the love of a God who counts every hair on our head. Indeed, we should go further than feeling reassured and be rightly energised by such love because we need '*not worry about how to speak or what to say; what you are to say will be given to you when the time comes; because it not you who will be speaking; the spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.*'<sup>17</sup> As we will all have been told when we were young, sometimes, it is not what we say, it is how we say it that is so important. Whatever we say, we should seek to do so in the spirit of the loving Father, with Christian patience and forbearance. We really ought to be awed by He who encompasses both body and soul and sometimes it is simply not good enough to duck the issue or speak with fingers crossed. We all have a right to speak, and at certain times it is a duty. It would be a pity to never exercise that right in favour of our Lord.

*'Meantime, along the narrow rugged path, thyself hast trod,  
lead, Saviour, lead me home in childlike faith, home to my God.  
to rest forever after earthly strife, in the calm light of everlasting life.'*

Our Lady of Walsingham, *pray for us*

St Joseph, *pray for us*

St Charles Borromeo, *pray for us*

With my prayers,

Rev. Mark McManus

Parish Priest

21 June 2020

The picture is of *The Denial of Saint Peter*, Caravaggio, 1610, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

1. *My God, accept my heart this day*, verse 1, Matthew Bridges, 1800-1894
2. *Deuteronomy* 11:18
3. *Matthew* 10:28
4. *Canon 1101*, Code of Canon Law, 1983
5. *Jeremiah* 20:12
6. *Jeremiah* 20:10
7. *Jeremiah* 20:13
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Psalms* 68:34
10. *Romans* 5:15
11. *John* 3:19
12. *John* 3:20
13. *Matthew* 10:26
14. *Matthew* 10:27
15. *Matthew* 10:32
16. *Psalms* 68:33-34
17. *Matthew* 10:19-20
18. *Lead, Kindly Light*, verse 4, St John Henry Newman, 1801-1890