

- As we return to Ordinary time, following Lent and Easter, we rejoin Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel during the first year of His public ministry.
  - He has just commissioned the twelve (Matthew 10:1-4) and is now instructing them as they are sent out.
  - As He sends them out, Jesus reminds them that, even though they must suffer hardship and persecution in his name, they should not be afraid in the face of the challenges that lie ahead.
- This is a perfect message for us at this point in the history of our community. Recently, we held a Town Hall meeting and I sensed there a great deal of fear
  - For some, it was fear of change, of being unsettled, of no clear path before us, of not being able to see or direct where we’re going, let alone going where we want.
  - But it was also my own fear, fear of my insecurities, of being overwhelmed, of facing challenges so much greater than my abilities. It was my fear of not being able to speak clearly or eloquently obscuring the message of Jesus Christ.
  - And fear leads to anger, resistance, hurt. Fear closes us off and keeps us from God and one another.
- And so Jesus says to us as much as, if not more so, than to His disciples: Do not be afraid!!
  - And what we hear repeated in today’s gospel is proof that we have a God who repeats himself, offering us a constant message throughout salvation history:
    - “Abraham, be the father of a great nation!”  
“Be not afraid, I am with you!”
    - “Moses, lead my people into freedom!”  
“Be not afraid! I am with you!”
    - “Jeremiah, renew my people!”  
“Do not be afraid, I am with you!”
    - And then the most pivotal moment of all:  
“Mary, you are to be the Mother of the Most High.” “Don’t be afraid, the Most High will overshadow you!”
    - “The apostles shouted out in fright. ‘It is a ghost!’” “Courage, it is I,” said Jesus.  
“Fear is useless; what is needed is trust!”
  - And now He repeats it to us in today’s Gospel
    - Do not be afraid. God’s in charge, there’s nothing to fear.
    - Do not be afraid. You are worth many sparrows, and just as God holds each one of them in His hand and not a one falls to the ground without His knowledge and concern, so too, our Father holds us close.
    - Do not be afraid, I walk with you every step of the way.
- It is no accident that this Gospel comes to us today.
  - God wants to make it perfectly clear to you as well as to me, that He is in charge. Yes, the way is unclear.
  - Yes, it will be difficult but God walks with us. God cares for us, more than a mother for her child.
- And with that promise, God asks one thing of us in today’s gospel:
  - Will we acknowledge Him before others?
  - THIS question is the most important one and the only one Jesus references as He sends out His disciples.
  - And it is the same question Jesus asks us: are you willing to acknowledge me not only here in this place but before others, out in the world, where we are being sent.
  - Our fear, hurt, anger and confusion pale in comparison to the task of sharing the Good News.

- How can answer this question of Jesus? Are we willing, above all to acknowledge Christ? Acknowledge Him before seeking to meet our own needs, and desires? And, what strategies can we use to do God's will?
- Our readings today give us insight.
  - In the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet faced hostile enemies who were ready to trip him up.
    - But Jeremiah kept faith, answered with faith, looking beyond his own fears, beyond his own inabilities.
    - Jeremiah knew his case was before the Lord and he trusted God would take care of him. He had faith in the God who had called him to the mission.
  - Faith in God is one answer. Hope is another.
    - If we trust the Lord with our future, then we have hope that the Lord will act in our future.
    - This was what Saint Paul wanted the Romans to know in our second reading.
    - Yes, there is much to fear because sin and death are in the world but, even more importantly, GOD is also in the world.
  - God's grace outstrips any evil, giving us hope. Our future is filled with hope, as we trust in the Lord, striving to follow Him, even and especially when it is difficult.
- And we know that it is difficult right now. We heard it last week and we sense it so very often in this time of upheaval and change, of uncertainty and challenge.
  - I am sorry that I added to that, that I got hurt and angry and defensive and tried to shut someone down. I'm sorry that I went off message, that the Town Hall Meeting was not the focus of trust, of faith and hope we hear in our readings today.
  - I am sorry that I focused on buildings and change rather than on the sure foundation that comes to us in Jesus Christ. My only goal was to point out that our future, rooted in Christ, is not limited to, and will last far longer, than any one of us and any building we have.
  - I am sorry that I was not more attentive in recognizing how Jesus already comes to us, how we share Christ with one another, and how we can support and lift one another up in the process of responding to the call of Christ
  - For all of this, I apologize and I beg your forgiveness.
  - But I will not, cannot apologize for offering and insisting on the message of Jesus Christ to "Go. Make disciples."
  - I cannot apologize for challenging you, better I should say for voicing the challenge Jesus presents to each of us, to all of us: to grow in our faith, to share the Good News, and to move
- This is precisely the message that shapes the office of Pastor. It is the same message I offer to Holy Family community as well as to you. Indeed, it is the same message that Jesus gives to me and to each of us as His followers.
  - "Go. Make Disciples." is His message, and we hear it reinforced at level of the Church.
  - It was the heart of the Second Vatican Council, that sought to not to correct doctrine but to examine the way the Church was in and related to the world, calling for a full, active and conscious participation, in liturgy and beyond, out in the world
  - Blessed Pope Paul VI wrote an encyclical about it and called this the very identity of the Church Herself.
  - Pope Saint John Paul II recognized it as the heart of the Great Jubilee from His apostolic exhortation, the Church in America:
    - 66. The basic task for which Jesus sends out his disciples is the proclamation of the Good News, that is, evangelization (cf. Mk 16:15-18). Consequently, "to evangelize is the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her most profound identity".

66. the lay faithful. .. precisely as members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel: they are prepared for this work by the sacraments of Christian initiation and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit”. They. . .should feel called and encouraged to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom. Jesus’ words: “You too, go into the vineyard” (Mt 20:4), must be seen as addressed not only to the Apostles but to all who desire to be authentic disciples of the Lord.
41. And this Saint also reminded us that the privileged place to be equipped and sent for this mission is our parish: The parish is a privileged place where the faithful concretely experience the Church ... The parish needs to be constantly renewed on the basis of the principle that “the parish must continue to be above all a Eucharistic community”. This principle implies that “parishes are called to be:
- welcoming and fraternal,
  - places of Christian initiation,
  - of education in and celebration of the faith,
  - open to the full range of charisms, services and ministries,
  - organized in a communal and responsible way,
  - capable of utilizing existing movements of the apostolate,
  - attentive to the cultural diversity of the people,
  - open to pastoral projects which go beyond the individual parish, and
  - alert to the world in which they live.”
- Archbishop Lori has spoken the same truth asking us to consider how we can do that, in a changing world with diminishing resources. How can we be present? How can we become what Pope Francis calls Missionary Disciples?
  - We heard it from our own people who were looking to draw in young people, especially their own children, many of whom have not encountered Jesus Christ or do find Him relevant in their lives.
  - This is why Christ has given this mission to us and to every other Christian and every Christian community, every Catholic parish. But we are not alone.
    - And so Christ says to us right now, at this point:
      - Fr. Rob, St. Francis-St. Mary, Do not be afraid.  
I have given you this Mission but I am here with you.
      - I call each of you to trust in me, to have faith and hope. Do not be afraid.
      - Do not be afraid, though the path of the pastorate and even the final outcome is unclear.
    - And God says to all of you:
      - Do not be afraid, God says, because I am with you to help you work together with one another and with Archbishop Lori and with Fr. Rob to help shape that direction and respond to my call.
      - Do not be afraid that you will not be heard or that your needs will not be met or that you will not be able to help shape the future of this community. This is precisely why the path is unclear. You have to help.
      - Do not be afraid to keep what it is good even as you change and move to a deeper relationship with me and with one another.
  - And me, I’m not off the hook, either. God says to me:
    - Do not be afraid, Robbie, (I’ve shared with you before that I think God calls me Robbie because my mother called me Robbie) that you are still learning to listen and to share the Good News yourself.

- Do not be afraid that you are growing in service, learning how to pastor a flock rather than manage a company. Do not be afraid to make mistakes. You have made many already and will make many more. But lead with your heart, love my people, help them to love me more.
- And God says to all of us:
  - Do not be afraid that you are confused, imperfect and not yet up to the task.
  - I did not choose you because you were strong or great. I choose the weak and make them strong, preparing you, equipping you for the mission I have called you to serve.
  - Do not be afraid. I call you only to acknowledge me and share the Good News. The rest, I will take care of.
- It is not easy to acknowledge Christ. But there is also something far greater, better to say some ONE far greater, than this challenge, than our fears.
  - That is Jesus Christ who calls us to trust, to have faith in God and Hope in God's working in our lives.
  - This faith and this hope, this trust in God is contagious and, as Saint Paul says, allows the grace of Christ to overflow for the many.
  - When we trust God, and have hope in our future with Him, we will acknowledge him before others - no matter the cost.
- Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.