

12th Sunday of Ordinary Time
 Tear A
 June 21, 2020

You need not be afraid

The author C.S. Lewis wrote seven stories called *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The first of the stories, *The Magician's Nephew* centres on a boy named Digory, who has brought into the brand new world of Narnia, a terrible witch named Queen Jadis. At the climax of the story our main character is in a place where he is overwhelmed by difficulty. Not only does he know that he is responsible for the evil visited upon infant Narnia - even more poignantly Digory's mother, who is back in England, is dying - and here in Narnia there is a medicinal apple that can heal her. Jadis tries to coax Digory to return to England with the apple, but the boy knows this would be wrong, it would be stealing! Now enters Aslan, the Lion - who in all seven stories is the character representing Jesus Christ. Aslan calls Digory forward and entrusts to him a mission that will help overturn the evil course Narnia is on because Jadis has brought night into what was supposed to be the Narnian dawn.

After Aslan calls Digory to take up this mission, the boy responds:

"I will try to help you if you'll promise to help my Mother," but he realized in time that the Lion was not at all the sort of person one could try to make bargains with. But when he had said "Yes," he thought of his Mother, and he thought of the great hopes he had had, and how they were all dying away, and a lump came in his throat and tears in his eyes, and he blurted out: "But please, please - won't you - can't you give me something that will cure Mother?"

Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself.

"My son, my son," said Aslan. "I know. Grief is great. Only you and I in this land know that yet. Let us be good to one another... The Lion drew a deep breath, stooped its head even lower and gave him a Lion's kiss. And at once Digory felt that new strength and courage had gone into him.¹

This scene captures in prose the theme at the heart of today's Gospel which is:

Those who "fear" God "need not be afraid".

Fear of God, which the Scriptures define as "*the beginning of wisdom*" coincides with faith in him, with sacred respect for his authority over life and the world.

¹ <https://lingualeo.com/es/jungle/the-chronicles-of-narnia-the-magicians-nephew-chapter-12-101903>

Digory becomes one who is emboldened because he is able to look Aslan in the face, and rightfully fears him. At first because he was concentrating on the Lion's great feet and huge claws he was intimidated and feels separated from the great animal. But when he looks into his face, and sees the shimmering tears of the Other, Digory knows that He – Aslan knows the reality of grief, and is even more sorrowful than Digory by his mother's terminal illness. Think about this in relation now to today's Gospel.

Jesus says that we are not to fear those whose only hold over life is in this temporal realm - ,that is those who can kill the body but cannot touch the soul. It is helpful to know that today's Gospel comes on the heels of a passage where Jesus predicts that because of the Mission he will be sending the Disciples to fulfill they will experience great hardship, persecution and even death. Amazingly Jesus says they are not to be afraid of the people who can inflict such trauma, but have a proper sense of trust in God. For remember Jesus then goes on to say:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.²

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said in 2008: “

To be without “fear of God” is equivalent to putting ourselves in his place, to feeling we ourselves are lords of good and evil, of life and death.”

Those who live bent on this way of life may be on a soul damning course – what we can describe as a self-destructive end.

Again quoting the Holy Father,

“Instead, those who fear God feel within them the safety that an infant in his mother's arms feels (cf. Ps 131: 2). Those who fear God are tranquil even in the midst of storms for, as Jesus revealed to us, God is a Father full of mercy and goodness. Those who love him are not afraid: “There is no fear in love”, the Apostle John wrote, “but perfect love casts out fear.”³

This is what we see represented by Digory when he is so close to Aslan that the moistness of the tears in turns leads to the great Feline Kiss. See how the theme is expressed by Jesus in today's text:

² [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 10:28). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.

³ <https://www.thepopespeaks.com/popes-previous-homilies-for-12th-sunday-of-the-year/>

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.⁴

Here is the heart of today's text. Jesus wants us to know that we are not on our own in this world. However, if we give up belief in God what are we left with? Well it means that we are on our own. And if we take that secular worldview to its logical end, how much more value is our life than that of a sparrow? What's the real difference between it? It's all just matter. There is no difference between the beasts and the human beings. We are just conglomerates of chemicals in the universe, if you have an outlook that marginalizes Jesus. And as that outlook spreads, people get more and more afraid because they feel like my life is not in my hands, I'm not in control, and once I die that is it, it's over. The curtain falls and that's the end of my existence. That's a fearful way to live.

But this is not how Jesus wants anyone to live. That is why he says that the Church is to embody by our life a mission that proclaims from the rooftops that in Jesus we have the one who looks us in the face. In Jesus we have the one who weeps with us and also breathes his life into ours so that even through there are those who willfully oppose the Gospel we are messengers of hope who want to work with the Lord to help ward off the night.

This is so we can live ever more trustingly and confidently, graciously inviting others to do the same; so that with Digory thereby know the strength and courage available when, in fearing God, we discover we need not be afraid.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*](#). (1993). (Mt 10:29–31). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.