

Reflection for the Twelfth Sunday of the Church's Year

Last week we were introduced by St Matthew to the twelve apostles whom Jesus sent out *“to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* When sending them out Jesus gave them a lengthy instruction, a small part of which we have just listened to in the gospel today. In the snippet we have heard Jesus speaks to them about fear and especially fear of the future. Twice in today's gospel he says, *“Have no fear”*. Firstly, *“have no fear”* to proclaim the gospel proudly - *“in the light...and on the housetops.”* And secondly, he tells them not to be afraid of persecution. They are not to *“fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”* He re-assures them that there is only one they need to fear and that is the one *“who can destroy both body and soul in hell”*, and he, who cares even for the sparrows, cares for them with a love that is so great that he numbers *“even the hairs of your head.”*

In our first reading Jeremiah the prophet speaks of his fears too. He was a prophet in the city of Jerusalem at a time of great upheaval when Jerusalem was under attack from both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. In 598BC the city fell to the Babylonians and many citizens were carried off into exile. Jeremiah remained in Jerusalem with a remnant of the population but the Jews who remained were so hostile to Jeremiah that he feared for his life. Today's passage is part of the 'Confessions of Jeremiah' in which he expresses his fear. He is having a conversation with himself, thinking out loud and praying to God. He speaks of *“terror on every side”*, and he refers to *“all my close friends, watching for my fall.”* He is frightened, indeed terrified, and yet he continues to put his trust in God. *“The Lord is with me”* he says, *“as a dread warrior”*; and therefore *“my persecutors will stumble, they will not overcome me.”* Indeed, *“they will be greatly shamed, they will not succeed.”*

Fear of the future can be crippling and life destroying. It is something that most of us have to deal with at some point in our lives. Our scriptures today focus on the real hostility of enemies and the real possibility of religious persecution. We may not live with such terrors in our times, but many can be overwhelmed by health scares and life-threatening illnesses. In these times we need to put our trust in the God who, in the words of Jesus in the gospel, numbers *“even the hairs of our head.”* And who, in the words of Jeremiah the prophet from the first reading, has *“delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evil doers.”*