

No More Fear

*33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Luke 21:5-19*

In 2016, Pope Francis declared, today, the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time as “World Day of the Poor”. Most find it hard to literally understand what it means to be poor. As of 2023, approximately 37 million people or 11% of the US population was considered to be living in poverty; to be poor. This of course means that 89% of the population is not considered poor. So while some of us may be considered poor or have at some time in our life been in a poverty state, most of us don’t really know what it means to be poor.

So let’s do a mental exercise to try to understand this condition. Let’s say that God came to you and said “I need your paycheck”. “Of course God”, you say, “how much”? “All of it”, God says; and he tells you where to send it. Those that receive it are very grateful and happy. God comes back again and asks for your next pay check. “How much this time?” you ask. “All of it” God says. With an anxious look you comply with God’s request. You have savings so you can get through this until God finds someone else. But God doesn’t find someone else and comes back week after week, month after month until there is a time you realize you are going to miss your mortgage payment, or you may have your utilities disconnected or you may run out of food. But denying God and losing the relationships you have developed because you believe your need is greater weighs heavily on your conscience. Now you may understand the one element the poor experience that the non-poor don’t – fear.

While it is easier to calculate the material needs of the poor, it is most difficult to calculate or even understand one of the main elements of being poor – that is, being afraid. Fear, in this case is not an emotion, it is a condition. If such condition is not checked, it becomes chronic and living in fear day after day, week after week, month after month takes an enormous toll on a person – emotionally, socially, physically, mentally and in many cases erodes relationships. Normal fear, which we all experience at some time, helps us to make decisions to move us in directions to reduce or eliminate fear. Chronic fear is usually associated with the loss of hope and the loss of hope now becomes detrimental to the soul and the trust and belief in God.

This is what the people in our Gospel today are feeling; the fear of the end times. Jesus does not help this fear as he proclaims that there will be wars, earthquakes, famine and plagues. He goes on to say many will be seized, betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives and friends and possibly even put to death. At this point the listeners had to be most fearful, but Jesus reminds them that they know him and he will not abandon anyone giving each the wisdom to speak rendering ones adversaries powerless. Most of all he promises that not a hair on your head will be destroyed.

The real key to this Gospel lies in the final sentence as Jesus says: “By your perseverance you will secure your lives”. This means that being a follower of Jesus, such as helping the poor, is not a one time event, it is constant and perpetual, even if it makes us anxious or a bit fearful. If the 89% of us can do what is necessary to reduce or eliminate chronic fear, then hope is restored and trust in God takes its rightful place in our lives and in the world.

This is why religion, which by recent accounts, is waning in our country is so very important. It is the framework by which we are able to know who Jesus is, so as not to be deceived by the imposters. It also helps us establish the trust in him we received at Baptism and allows us to

become the disciples he needs; dependable versus dependent, givers rather than takers, generous rather than addicted to self interests. Knowing all along we will have the wisdom given to us to stand against our adversaries and all the while the trust that no harm will come to us. And fear will have no place in our lives.

I conclude with a story that hopefully puts this notion of fear in proper perspective.

A long time ago there lived a little boy whose parents had died. He was taken in by an aunt who raised him as her own child. Years later, after he had grown up and left his aunt, he received a letter from her. She had a terminal illness and, from the tone of her letter, he knew she was afraid of death. This man whom she had raised and touched wrote her a letter in which he said:

It is now thirty five years since I, a little boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word that you would give me a home and be a mother to me. I've never forgotten the day when I made the long journey of ten miles to your house. I can still recall my disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant, Caesar, to fetch me. I well remember my tears of anxiety as, perched high on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home.

Night fell before we finished the journey, and as it grew dark, I became even more afraid. "Do you think she'll go to bed before I get there?" I asked Caesar anxiously. "Oh no," said Caesar, "she's sure to stay up for you. When we get out of these woods, you'll see her light shining in the window."

Presently, we did ride out into the clearing and there was your light. I remember that you were waiting at the door; that you put your arms tight around me; that you lifted me – a tired, frightened little boy – down from the horse. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my new room. You heard me say my prayers. Then you sat with me until I fell asleep.

You probably realize why I am trying to recall this to your memory now. Very soon, God is going to send for you, and take you to a new home. I'm trying to tell you that you needn't be afraid of the summons or of the strange journey or of the dark messenger of death. God can be trusted. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you did for me so many years ago.

At the end of the road you'll find love and a welcome waiting. And you'll be safe in God's care. I'm going to watch and pray for you until you're out of sight. And I shall wait for the day when I make the same journey myself and find you waiting at the end of the road to greet me. (*Death Comes for His Aunt – Arthur Gordon*)

If we trust in God and follow his plan and are persistent in our works of love and discipleship we can live fearlessly in this world knowing all along we too will make the final journey finding at the end of the road all the people we loved and helped and brought hope to by crushing fear. Mostly, though, we will find Jesus with arms opened wide to hold us tight and welcome us to our new home.

Deacon Tom Sheehan
November 16, 2025