“Fear No One”
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time 2017
Reflection By: Deacon Paul V. Hursh

“Fear no one.” (Matthew 10:26a)
The world is a dangerous place and there are many people who would stir our emotions to increase fear thereby exercising control over us. Fear mongering is their way to convince us that we need to take action in our defense. Their motive may be to sell weapons, to divide people, to advance their agenda. In the face of this culture of fear, we hear Jesus' command... “Fear no one.”

There is no shortage of reasons for us to be fearful, as I have said, the world is a dangerous place and there are acts of violence, terrorism, and a war in every corner of the globe. So how are we to accept Jesus' admonishment against fear, on what basis can we set aside our fears and live peaceful and tranquil lives? Well first of all Jesus did not promise peaceful and tranquil lives, he sends us as sheep among wolves and that we must endure persecution and resistance – even from our families. Given this, why should we put down our guard when there are those who would harm us?

The primary object of fear is the unknown, unknown motives of others, unknown outcomes of conflicts, or unknown character of the stranger. We fear the shadowy things beyond our ability to perceive them, or an uncertain future. The manipulators of this world know our greatest fears and they play on these fears to their advantage. Jesus realizes our fear of the unknown and so his instruction to the disciples was to assure them that “Nothing that is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known.” (Matthew 10:26b) When our wild imagining is brought to light much of what we fear disappears, as do phantasms at the dawn of a new day. In the words of Thomas Carlyle, “Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.” So what are we to do about those truly dangerous situations and people in our world?
When faced with immediate threat our discipleship will meet its greatest challenge to follow the words and actions of Jesus. Though it seems to be within our right to respond in kind to an attack, Jesus instructs, “…offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well.” This teaching by Jesus is backed up with how he lived his life. When he was arrested and mistreated he offered no resistance. How closely are we committed to the life and teaching of Jesus? Though we may feel within our rights to act in self-defense very often defense can expand into offense and retribution. When this occurs we become the evil that we oppose. This is why Jesus instructs not to resist evil, even though this seems an extreme position, he is trying to preserve our holiness. How are we to endure the requirements of discipleship?

Like Jeremiah in our first reading today we will be faced with adversity, and like Jeremiah, we are called to trust in God for to God we have entrusted our cause. This takes courage, which is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. To be clear, Courage is not the absence of fear, but making the right choice in spite of being afraid. Pope Francis in an audience (May 14, 2014) said “with the gift of courage the Holy Spirit frees the soil of our heart from torpor [inactivity], uncertainties and all the fears that can stop it, so that the Word of God can be put into practice, in an authentic and joyful way. This is a real help, this gift of fortitude gives us strength and frees us from many obstacles.” We can then, proclaim on the housetops what we hear whispered by Christ in our hearts.