

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

June 21, 2020

Homily of Most Reverend Mario Yamanouchi Michiaki

“Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

(Matthew 10:31)

### **In Saitama Diocese**

Starting today, our diocese is gradually resuming public Masses on Sunday. Although the number of coronavirus infections has decreased, we are still far from saying that we have overcome them. For this reason, while maintaining sufficient care, each parish has sought the best possible way to resume Sunday Mass. The virus prevention methods adopted by the parishes on the last two Sundays of June will help us to take this first step towards the resuming of public Masses. Let us all pray that we can normalize the situation starting in July.

Today is the Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, and I would like to show you in my homily how the first Christians had to face the difficult social conditions. But you will see that what they faced is something very close to us especially as we have been in the face of this pandemic of the new coronavirus for more than three months now.

### **Fear in the face of danger**

The Gospels have preserved for us some sayings with which Jesus exhorted the community of his disciples not to be intimidated by adversity. The early Christian communities had to face various threats that came especially from two sides: the powerful Roman Empire and the rebels against the oppressive Roman system who constantly sought the opportunity to wage armed conflict. On the one hand, the Roman authorities deployed military and police power in a massive scale throughout the empire; and on the other hand, the fanatical rebels were ready to eliminate anyone who disagreed with them. Caught between these two pressures, the Christian communities lived in a crossfire, trying to offer a proposal for peace and justice that did not agree with either side.

For the ROMANS, justice meant submitting to Roman legislation. Submission to strict rules

of Pax Romana, or Roman peace, forced the residents of the colonies to pay heavy tributes, to incorporate into their own religions the worship of the imperial gods, to assign large masses of the population to slavery and compulsory military service. The Christian communities were struggling to have a place for them, a space for their proposal in society: they wanted a humane community where solidarity, respect for others, and fair distribution of resources were valued. However, in this struggle they were practically alone.

The REBELLING GROUPS presented themselves as the great alternative against the empire, and were governed by the logic of uncontrollable violence, the submission of dissidents and the imposition of the group's ideology. These fanatical groups saw Christians as a threat to the group's identity, so they often made them the target of persecution and a "scapegoat" to take on all their frustration, arrogance and intolerance.

But Jesus warned the whole communities against the belief that the only threat was represented by the weapons of the army or the rebels. The most serious threat often came from the ideologies that these groups represented. We should know that "ideologies" are the projection of the way of being of a government onto society; thus the world is submitted to diverse ideologies like the capitalist, communist, terrorist, militarist, etc. And in the midst of these ideological currents, Christianity, specifically Christians, must be very careful not to let themselves be carried away by these ideologies. To do this, listening attentively to the Gospel of Jesus will help us to remain free and not be carried away by these ideologies. It is certainly not easy, and will require from us much effort, perhaps, to suffer for that, the persecution.

### **With Pope Francis**

Pope Francis also clearly points out the danger of political and religious ideologies that can become hotbeds of fanatics who try to usurp power, manipulating people's conscience, especially threatening their lives, instilling fear in them, if they do not take their side.

When we read the Word of God, we must not forget the historical and social context in which the recipients, the Christian communities, were living. Today's Gospel according to Matthew, for example, reflects it clearly. In a way, our communities today also have something in common with the situation described there. Knowing how they managed to cope with that reality can give us the strength to live this historical moment with hope.

Let us conclude this homily by keeping in our hearts the words of Jesus: "Are not two

sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10:29-31)

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE).