



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend's readings remind us that we are not to be afraid of the things in this world; we're not even supposed to be afraid of death. This, of course, is hard, since we're so immersed in the things of this world, but Jesus reminds us to keep our eyes fixed on Him and His promises. When we remember the promise of heaven and what this truly means, then there should be no fear of death, for it is the entrance into the merciful arms of our loving God.

Jesus reminds us that even in this life, we are in the hands of Almighty God, and that each hair on our head is numbered. He loves us and is paying attention. The spiritual tradition of the Church reminds us that everything that happens to us comes to us through the hands of Jesus... even the things that are evil. Note that it doesn't say everything comes *from* God, but even the worst evil that afflicts our lives first passes through the hands of God. This means that we can trust Him to make good out of evil, that nothing is beyond redemption. When we face so many

evils, do we remember this?

And if we follow Christ faithfully, we will come against resistance, evil and persecution. The world hates to hear the message of the Gospel, because it goes directly contrary to the self-centeredness the world lives. This means that over the centuries, many Christians have been persecuted and killed for the Faith. Jesus tells us: do not be afraid, you are in the hands of God. In the United States at this time, persecution doesn't mean death or even exile, but it could mean being shunned or "cancelled." When we speak the truth (even when done in love), we will be persecuted, cancelled and called "haters." But Jesus calls us to be witnesses of the truth, even when people don't like it. This doesn't mean that we shove it in the face of others, but that we don't back down when we are confronted.

This "Cancel Culture" seems to be most vehement around anything that is "heretical" to the tenets of the sexual revolution. God has created us in His image and likeness, He has created us to image the eternal love within the heart of the Trinity, and we can see that this reality is stamped into our bodies – that we were called to give ourselves to each other in love. But our world says that sex is merely recreation not a total, permanent and free donation of self to the other, so open to giving life to the other that nine months later you might have to give that love a name. Our world says that when contraception fails, we can kill our children through abortion, and even after the child is born. Our world says that we can redefine marriage and the sexual act so that it is between two people of the same sex. Our world says that we can even change our sex or gender. When we as individuals or as Church stand for what is the truth in these matters, we are hated. When we try to speak the truth in love, we are called haters.

And Jesus says, "Fear no one" (Matthew 10:26). We will not be liked by the world, but God is taking care of us. We must do all in love, of course, but love doesn't mean that we're "nicey, nicey." Love means we want the good for the other as other; and the good is always aligned with the truth.

I want to comment here on God's mercy. God always loves us. God always accepts us, no matter where we are or what we've done. His mercy endures forever. No matter what our struggles are, God wants to walk with us. He does not require us to be perfect to come to Him. But He is always drawing us to the truth, and we have to choose to accept or reject that truth. There is no person God ever rejects. We have to make sure, though, that we do not reject Him, by rejecting the truth and obstinately cling on to the lies of this world. If you or someone you know struggles with any of these issues, turn to the Lord, and ask for the grace to accept the Truth – Jesus – in the midst of the confusion and chaos of this world.