

HOMILY 12th SUN OT YRA 2017

“The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Many of you probably know this famous quote from FDR’s first inaugural speech in 1933. The country was in the midst of the Great Depression and facing all kinds of problems. I think we have a lot of fear and anxiety in our world today. I think it partially comes from the fact that everything in our world seems out of control from international events to our personal lives. Fear and anxiety itself can be a big problem. It can paralyze us and prevent us from moving forward and doing the things we need to do. I do not think the fear and anxiety is going to go away any time soon, it is a normal reaction to some of life’s situations, but we cannot let it paralyze us. We need to feel the fear and anxiety, and do it anyway.

Do not be afraid is an obvious theme in our Gospel reading today. In the short passage we heard today, Jesus tell us not to be afraid 3 times. I think he is making a point. He tells us to fear no one. What you hear whispered, proclaim on the rooftops. I think he is talking here about evangelizing, sharing our faith. I think many of the problems we have in our world today would be solved if we had more disciples of Jesus Christ, don’t you think? We need to bring what happens here at church to those who are not here. If we are going to grow the church all of the disciples of Jesus Christ have to be involved. Archbishop Vigneron recently released a letter on evangelization as a result of our recent synod. One of the points he makes in this letter is that evangelization is not about a program or a membership drive. It is about passing on the faith one person at a time through personal contact and it is up to all of us to play our part.

I think there is some fear and anxiety connected with evangelization. One of the things we need to remember about evangelization is that it is about spreading the Good News. Do you believe it is good news? What is so difficult about spreading good news? I think we normally love to do that. Why is it different when it involves our faith? Sharing the good news is what we need to focus upon. If we are going to bring people back to the Church or bring people to the Church for the first time, it is by sharing the good news with them.

We are not going to get people back by condemning them or judging them. Think about what is good about your faith, your connection with Jesus Christ, your connection with St. Edith and share that.

Sometimes I think there is some fear and anxiety about evangelizing because you are afraid that you may get onto a difficult topic, or you do not know the right thing to say, or that you may not know the answer to a question. We heard in the Gospel that even the hairs on your head have been counted. God knows everything about you and loves you unconditionally. If you are evangelizing he will help you. Evangelization is not so much a matter of knowing what you say, but by reflecting the Gospel by your actions, how you treat people. If someone has an issue with something that has happened in the church, sometimes they just need to vent. Well that was the bad news. Tell them the good news. A good response can be: “How do you think we could make things better?” It is ok to say: “Yes, I kind of struggle with that myself. This is where I am at with the issue. What do you think?” I do not worry so much about what to say because I frequently get on to a difficult topic and somehow I just know what to say at the time. Sometimes afterward I think: “That was a pretty good response. Where did that response come from?” I think it came from the Holy Spirit. And it is ok to say that you do not know. People frequently come to me and want me to tell them what to do, and I frequently cannot do that. I can sometimes ask the right questions. I can sometimes tell them what to consider. We all have a free will and we need to make decisions for ourselves. We each have to discern for ourselves. Ultimately we will be held responsible for the decisions we make.

I think there will always be some fear and anxiety connected with evangelization, but when it comes to evangelization the only thing we have to fear is fear itself. If we are going to make the world a better place, we each need to do our part. If we are going to grow our Church we each have to do it through personal contact with one person at a time. And it is not so hard. Remember you are spreading the good news, and God will help you. Feel the fear and anxiety and do it anyway!