

Grace and peace to you, beloved, on this Father's Day.
And especially to every father here
the ones who raised us
the ones who stepped up when nobody else would
the grandfathers
the godfathers
the those uncles
who somehow always had a five-dollar bill folded in their shirt pocket
Happy Father's Day.

Whether you are a father of children
a father in the faith
or simply a man who has spent his life showing up...
the Church gives thanks... for you... this morning.

Now, I have to confess something.
When I sat down with this morning's readings...
I thought... what were they thinking?
Because I wanted a set of texts for a gentle, sentimental Father's Day.
a few verses about neckties... lawnmowers... burnt toast at breakfast.
These... are ***not*** those texts.
Jeremiah... ***shakes his fist*** at God.
The Psalmist... ***up to his neck in deep water.***
Paul... ***talked about dying.***
And Jesus... ***sweet*** Jesus...
Telling us ***not to fear...***
the ones... who can kill... the body!

I looked at all of it... and thought... “Lord. On Father's Day? Really?”

And then... I *heard* it.

Underneath all of it

Like Sly and Robbie playing *underneath* Peter Tosh... Black Uhuru...

One phrase kept playing: "***Do not be afraid.***"

Jesus said it *three times* in our Gospel. **Three times.**

And I realized... these are *not* the wrong readings for Father's Day.

They are *exactly* the *right* ones.

Because if there is one thing...

a good father says...

over and over and over...

In a *thousand* different ways... it's this:

Do not be afraid. I'm here. I've got you.

Jeremiah... The Man... Who *Argued* with God

Let's start... *with Jeremiah*

Jeremiah... Does *not*... *pretend*.

***"O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed."***

That's *not polite* language.

That is a man... telling God... right to His face...

"You talked me into this, and now look at me."

I'm a laughingstock.

People mock me all day long.

He says... the word of the Lord has become...

A reproach and derision... All. Day. Long."

And here's the coolest part...
Jeremiah *doesn't quit*... but... he *doesn't fake it* either.

He tried to hold it in...
Then within me...
there is something like a burning fire... shut up in my bones...
He *didn't* quit... he *couldn't* quit!

Ever try to hold something in...
that *the Lord... put in you?*
You *try* to be quiet... you *try* to mind your business...
But that *fire*... just keeps *burning and burning*...
until you *have to* say something.

Some of you came here
with a fire like that in your bones.
You left Jamaica... Haiti... Trinidad... Barbados... Guyana...
Or England... Canada... New York...
Packed up everything you could fit into a suitcase
kissed your mother goodbye at the airport
and boarded a plane for a place... *you'd only seen on television.*

Some people laughed at you. Said *you'll never make it.*
And... on a freezing cold snowy morning... far... far from home...
Just like Jeremiah... You cried out to God:
You enticed me, Lord. You brought me all this way.
Where are You... Now?"

Listen to the good news.

Right in the middle of his complaint... Jeremiah turns a corner:

But... The Lord is with me like a dread warrior.

A Dread Warrior

In Caribbean culture...

a ***Dread Warrior***... is a spiritual freedom fighter

their dreadlocks... a symbol of cultural resilience...

and a connection to the Lion of Judah... and Almighty God

But in Jeremiah's time...

It described a fierce champion of the Lord

Who ***emphasized*** God's ***unmatched powers***...

Who ***fought*** for ***followers of the faith***...

and ***struck fear***... into the hearts of enemies.

The Lord is with me like a dread warrior.

The very thing... Jeremiah's enemies used to ***shame*** him...

God used... ***to stand beside him.***

That fire didn't burn him up.

It carried him through.

And it carried you, too.

Look around you...

You made it.

God... was with you... like a dread warrior... the whole time.

The Psalmist... Up to his Neck in Deep Water

Then we come to Psalm 69
the psalmist is in deep water... literally.

Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck.

Now, in a congregation that knows hurricanes the way we do...
That's not a *metaphor we take lightly*.
Some of you have watched the water *come right up the steps*.
You know what it is... to feel... howling wind... explosive rain...
And rising water... and wonder... ***how high it will go.***

And the psalmist says something...
to comfort every one of us... who has *ever felt alone*:

***"I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children."***

Even Jeremiah's own family didn't understand him.
But... He ***keeps*** talking to God... *anyway*.
He *doesn't* go silent.
He ***keeps*** praying... ***right through the flood.***

"But as for me... my prayer is to you... O Lord."

That is faith.
Not *the absence* of the *flood*...
Rather... ***a word to God***... in the *middle* of it.

Paul... Buried with Him... Raised with Him

Now Paul... in Romans... lifts our eyes to the biggest picture of all.
He says... we were baptized into Christ's death... so that

*Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
So... we too... might walk in newness of life.*

Did you catch *who does the raising?*
"The glory of the Father."

On Father's Day... Paul reminds us of the *first Father*
the One who *raised His own Son...*
from a borrowed tomb and proclaimed...
Death will not have the last word. Not in My family.

And then Paul gives us a line... *to carry home:*
The death he died, he died to sin, once for all;
but the life he lives, he lives to God."

Once. And for all.

That means *the old you...* the *frightened* you... the *ashamed* you...
The you... that *some other person...*
Decided... who you would always be...
That you... is buried.

You don't have to *go back and dig it up.*

You are *walking...* in *newness...* of **life.**
So when fear comes knocking
Answer that door... and say...

Sorry... *that guy... Doesn't live here anymore!*

Jesus: Three Times... “Do Not Be Afraid”

Which brings us... at last...
to Jesus and that *Riddim Twins* rhythm underneath.

Three times in this Gospel...
Jesus tells us... *Do not to be afraid*...
and each time... *He gives us a reason*.

The *first time*...

Do not fear... because *nothing stays* hidden.
Nothing is covered up... that won't be uncovered.
Truth wins... eventually.
So... **Stop Being Afraid**
of what some people *whisper* about you...
because the God who *sees in secret*... **is on the side of the truth**.

The second time...

Do not fear... because you are *watched over*...
down to the *tiniest detail*.

Notice to how *tender* Jesus gets:

Two sparrows sold for a penny?

Not one of them... will fall to the ground... apart from your Father.

Even the hairs of your head are all counted.

Now... as I look out at my brothers this morning
for some of us... *that's not a long count*.

*The Father finished **that** inventory... many years ago*.

But that's the point, isn't it?
He knows the exact number...
whether it's a full head... or a shining one.
You are not just a face in a crowd to God.
You are known down to your last hair.

And the third time...

the line that holds us all together:

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

That's the gospel in one sentence.

You... are valuable.

Not because of *what you earn*

Not because of *how you look*

Not because of *the country stamped on your passport*

But because...

The Father made you...

and treasures you.

The Hard Words — and the Warm Welcome

Now I won't skip over *the hard part*
Because *you'd know* I was *dodging*.

When Jesus said...
***He came to bring not peace but a sword
to set a man against his father.***

What did He mean?

He means... ***following Him will cost you something.***
Sometimes...
It costs you the approval of the very people you love most.

Some of you know that cost firsthand...
you chose Christ...
you chose Holy Faith...
and not everyone at home *understood*.

Jesus isn't surprised by your division.
He's honest about it.
But hear this:
*The same Jesus who speaks of the sword
opens His arms and says*

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.”

The cost is real.
So is the welcome.

And that... beloved... is what we are all about at Holy Faith.
We are a people... of radical welcome.

When you come through those doors
whatever land you came from
whatever your accent
however long the journey
however heavy the burden
you are *welcomed here... not as a visitor... not as a guest...
but as family.*

Because a real father's house
is a house with the porch light on
and a plate still warm in the oven.

Going Home

So let me bring it home.

*Jeremiah argued with God
and found Him standing close like a warrior.*

*The psalmist prayed through the rising water
and was not abandoned.*

*Paul reminds us the Father raises the dead
and gives us new life.*

*And Jesus, three times over, looks us in the eye and says,
“Do not be afraid.”*

Fathers, here is your charge.
The most important thing you will ever say to your children,
your grandchildren,
your godchildren,
is not “be successful” or “make money” or “make me proud.”

It is the very thing our Father in heaven says to us:

***“Don't be afraid. I'm here. I've got you.
You are of more value than huge flocks of sparrows.”***

Say it *often*.
Say it *until they believe it*.
Say it *until you believe it too*.

And to all of us...
the fathers *and the mothers*
the young *and the seasoned*
the ones *with a fire in their bones*
and the ones *up to their necks in deep water*
the word of the Lord this Father's Day is steady and sure.

You are known.

You are counted.

You are welcomed.

You are loved by a Father... who never once looked away.

So...

DO. NOT. BE. AFRAID.

And the people of God say... Amen.