

[Readings: Jer. 20-10-13; Psalm 69; Rom. 5:12-15; Matt. 10:26-33]

“I hear the whispering of many.” What is the local grapevine saying about you that troubles you? How does it affect your ability to do your job well? How do you deal with gossip at work, at school, at the game, and I dare say, here in the church parking lot or even in this very worship space? “Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed.” Do you have secrets about yourself? How do these connect with your fears? What would be likely to happen if your deepest, darkest secrets were made public? What does this awareness spur you to do so as to live a more integrated life? Poor Jeremiah. Poor you. Poor me.

All of us have suffered to some degree the personal agony of having someone lessen our good name, or blacken our reputation by spreading false reports about us, or by misinterpreting our actions, or by twisting the meaning of our words or by misjudging our intentions and emotions. Few things, if any, are more precious to someone than his or her good name and good health. And yet, if we have suffered from having our good name damaged, we probably have also done our own fair share of lessening other people's good names as well – sometimes unknowingly, sometimes intentionally, and sometimes perhaps even maliciously. Even if the information is true.

This is a form of “bearing false witness,” as forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. We bear true witness for false reasons. Pope Francis says that this is tantamount to verbal or psychic murder – That's the Fifth Commandment. We kill the good name and reputation of someone with false reports, false interpretations, or simply by passing along juicy and malicious gossip. Even if the information is true, it is called slander. Libel if it is in written form. If the information is false, it is called calumny. All are deadly – to you and to your victim. The damage done cannot be revoked, much like trying to put back into a torn pillow its feathers now blowing in the wind after shaking the pillow outdoors.

What is the motive for spreading such bad news? Is it jealousy, self-righteousness, the hurt inflicted upon us by another, our desire to appear more important than others? What do we do with this? Where do we go?

We take consolation in the words of Jeremiah: "But the Lord is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion." Our hope is that not only will the Lord restore our good name, if tarnished, but that the Lord will punish those who knowingly and maliciously have tried to hurt us. We leave the judgement and the punishment up to God.

Finally, Jesus tells us in the Gospel today that we shouldn't really worry about those who try to harm us, unless they also have the power to stifle the life of grace within us or can force us to deny Jesus. In short, safeguard the good name of others, and God will safeguard yours.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, psychiatrist, author and survivor of the Nazi regime, Viktor Frankl wrote this: "We who have lived in concentration camps can remember those who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number; but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from [you] but one thing, the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's own way."

On any given day, we can look at our world and view it as a "concentration camp," a prison created by human sin. We can assess the violence, the inhumanity and the injustice and decide that sin seems to have taken the upper hand and has the world and all its peoples in a stranglehold. But St. Paul, in our Second Reading will not allow such negativity. Anyone can give up in the face of sin. But the graced person freely chooses another path, and that choice can make all the difference. Pope Francis says that we must see our role as a Church to be a field hospital after battle. Or, in our present situation, a field hospital during the current wars we are fighting. Pope Francis says, "It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars. You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else." You have to heal his wounds first. Then talk.

St. Paul puts it this way: "For if by the transgression of the one the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many." Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." Fear

imprisons, faith liberates; fear paralyzes, faith empowers; fear disheartens, faith encourages; fear sickens, faith heals." "You are worth more." Than fear.

The gift bestowed by Jesus is the reason we can preach the Gospel without fear. Jesus does not deny the darkness, the possibility of death to those who both preach and live the Gospel. The body can be killed!

In fact, Christians should expect this violence if we live as citizens of the kingdom of God. Citizens of this kingdom proclaim and live a peace that the secular world rejects. We give our cloak over to the one who has wronged us, our face to be spit upon. We recognize the dignity of every life, every race, every person, no matter their age.

And now, some thoughts on Father's Day.

Even though we are finally creeping up on its halfway point, the year 2020 still seems like the year that will never end. What started as a year certain to be dominated by a presidential campaign and election has turned into a year of pandemic, economic woes, joblessness and continued racial strife. Our nation is divided. Struggling to find balance, perspective and truth, we are a society and a Church deeply in need of strong fathers.

In our Catholic tradition, fathers occupy a critical role in both arenas. In our homes, fathers are called to lead the family by their good example -- to love their spouses as Christ loved the Church (that is, to give their very lives for them) and to raise their children in the practice of the Faith, relying on the dual pillars of truth and mercy. As we honor our fathers this Father's Day, we thank our priests and dads for the work they have done to help our society and our Church through this difficult time. And we encourage them to keep it up by continuing to lead by a solid, Christian example. Dads, our nation needs you. Our Church needs you. Your children need you. Perhaps more than you will ever know! AMEN!