

[Readings: Isaiah 55:1-3; Psalm 145; Romans 8:35, 37-39; Matthew 14:13-21]

The famous American Author Mark Twain once wrote, "I have known many troubles in my life, most of which never happened." I'm sure that all of us have become very familiar with specific troubles that, in the end, never happened. We simply conjured up their likelihood and worried over them as though we'd actually suffered through them.

In today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul lists a number of possible threats to our relationship to God, and one of those threats is what he calls "future things." I'm sure if we all took a bit of time to try to think of one such "future thing" it would take us less than a minute to come up with something. But we won't do that because you'll spend the rest of the time during this homily thinking about that future thing you're worried about! Instead, let's focus on Saint Paul's conviction that nothing can separate us from the love of God, including all those future things that will never actually happen. Do you know the expression, "Every dark cloud has a silver lining?" Well, my best friend, Fr. Jim Bjorum often tells me that I have the gift of "finding the dark cloud behind every silver lining!" I'm not a pessimist, I am a realist!

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Trial or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or the sword? Those lines have saved me from many trials that might have robbed me of courage and from many dangers that seemed poised to consume me. Memorize these words from Romans 8:35: *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.* Let's look at the contenders that St. Paul mentions. "Anguish and distress" can't take Christ away from us. Count the ways we suffer from grief, self-doubt, loneliness, depression, and personal failures. As difficult as these burdens are, they cannot dissolve our bond with the One -- the only One -- Who saves. "Persecution" can't do it: nothing that comes from the outside, no kind of social pressure, rejection, disapproval, libel, or shame. We have nothing to fear either from "famine or nakedness."

These and other material deprivations can cause great harm and even threaten our existence. But not our life, ultimately, because our life is in Christ. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.*

Should we feel anxious in the face of “peril”? We live in a world full of reasons to be insecure: pandemics, racism, domestic violence, poverty, and economic instability. A sudden illness could wipe out our savings.

Paul assures us that even if the worst things we can imagine come to pass, they cannot put us beyond the love of the One Who gave His life for us.

How about “the sword”? Violence is the great dark love song of a generation that the Saint John Paul II called a “Culture of Death.” But Jesus Himself was a victim of capital punishment, and even the Cross could not break our communion with Him. In fact, the Cross became the very bridge through which our reconciliation with God was achieved and over which humanity can now safely pass for the grand reunion. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.*

“Not death nor life” -- Our present state of affairs is not an impediment, as the Church’s position on Purgatory and praying for the dead has always suggested. “Not angels and principalities,” those ancient powers of the air that could be capriciously well-intentioned or malicious, just as the spirit of good or evil may inhabit a person today. Interestingly, Paul targets time as being no obstacle, whether it be the present or the future, now or later. One might hope to extend that to the past as well, because many people believe that God will never forgive what lies there. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.*

“Powers” -- Worldly authorities like governments, churches, parents, human law, and public opinion -- cannot keep us from the Heart of God. And we need not be anxious about “height and depth,” shorthand for the heavens and the underworld, because these, like everything else that exists, are mere creatures in the hands of the Creator, Who is unreservedly on our side.

Paul speaks consistently with Isaiah, who insists that all who thirst can come to the water; and with Jesus, who invites multitudes to take and eat. There

is something for everybody here. No matter who comes, or what they need, there will be enough. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.*

In our Gospel, the death of John the Baptist invites Jesus to contemplate His own mission to give His life for the world. Jesus had heard how John the Baptist had died. Jesus knew that He would be next.

And so, He wants to be alone, to mourn the death of His cousin and to contemplate the imminence of his approaching passion.

But the crowds won't have it. They follow Him. Even as He is contemplating the violence that human beings can enact, the sin of the world, He looks with compassion on the crowds. Violence is transformed by the love of the Word made flesh, Who heals the sick and feeds the hungry.

In this moment, Jesus reveals God's plan for us. Whatever violence we can experience, God will not abandon us. God's sacrificial love transforms a violent world order into a space of generosity.

As vulnerable creatures, we are subject to anguish, distress, persecution, famine and all sorts of suffering. But, none of this can separate us from the love of Christ, from the love of the God-man who gave His life for the world. Pleasant thoughts will not save us from such violence. Rather, only the love that emptied Himself upon the Cross, the love that survived death – the love that enters bread and wine and becomes our spiritual food and drink -- only the love of Jesus Christ can transform a violent world.

“The hand of the Lord feeds us, He answers all our needs.” So, let us receive the bread of compassion from the hands of the Lord. Come to the Feast of Heaven and earth, and then go out to feed a starving and thirsting world. Through this gift, may our eyes be formed to perceive even in the meaningless violence of this age, the first rays of hope of the age to come. AMEN!