

Homily: 23rd Sunday: 2024: Cycle B: Is 35:4-7; Ps. 146; James 2:1-5; Mk 7: 31-37

“The Dynamic of Fear in our Life”

1. **Dealing with fear, anxiety, and craziness in life:** I remember as a young priest a few years in, I was dealing with a lot of crazy stuff in my family and in my pastoral work and felt overwhelmed at the time, and just to get a better perspective I went to see a Catholic psychologist - just 3 or 4 times. It was very helpful to put things in perspective along with regular confession and growing in my prayer life. In our time, there is a lot of talk on taking care of one’s **mental health** esp. among young adults. That’s a very good thing, as long as you also remember that a big part of sound mental health is how we are doing in our moral and spiritual life. So, counseling needs to be connected in our mind with regular reception of the Sacrament of Confession and making more time for prayer and spiritual reading. And for those who really want to grow and integrate all parts of their life - seeking out a good spiritual director. Taping more into the 7 spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit that we received in Baptism/Confirmation is also essential: *wisdom, understanding, knowledge, counsel, fortitude, fear of the Lord, and piety.*
2. **What causes the paralyzing fear and anxiety to take over in our life?** Well keep in mind at times we don’t have much control over some of this, as things nail us at times in life, as I referenced before in my own life early as a priest; also if someone objectively suffers from various types of mental and emotional illness: either because of genetic make-up or because someone was traumatized in life, then this is a **Cross** that the Lord will help us to bear; and hopefully we will find some relief through medicine and counseling and love from others, and even possible ultimate healing in God - if He sees it is essential on our path to salvation. But even if He doesn’t fully heal us in this passing life, He will give us the graces to bear it for ourself and the spiritual good of others. What a beautiful offering of suffering in surrender to His mysterious designs. Also, much of the paralyzing fear in our life comes from one source: namely **SIN** in all its various forms as Jesus laid out in last Sunday’s Gospel (Mk 7: 1-8, 14-15, 21-23). When we sin, it damages (venial) or destroys (mortal) us: in our relationship with God,

others and ourselves. We should feel the pangs of our conscience after we deliberately commit a sin, which either then leads to **repentance**: *by telling God right away we are sorry and going to the Sacrament of Confession, if it is serious; or we resist that call, and over time our conscience becomes “numb”, and yet we sometimes feel an ongoing sense of dread and it even may lead us to avoid or even hate God because we see Him as a threat to our selfish “happiness.”* This is **“the Adam and Eve dynamic”** because if you look at what happened after the first human beings sinned – *they tried to hide themselves from God, literally, and had a fear and a dread of the Lord’s Presence; when prior to sinning, they loved the Lord and “walked with Him.”* In our life the same thing can happen, and it is often seen in our image of God in our mind and heart. **How do we view the Lord?** Do we see Him as a **“harsh taskmaster”** who is always taking notes of all the bad things that we do and is going to get us in time? Or do we see God as a **“big softie”** who loves us no matter what we do and doesn’t care about good and evil? **Both of those images are serious distortions of who God really is!** The true image of God is seen in **the Divine Mercy Picture** with the red ray symbolizing God’s mercy and the white ray His holiness. He is all loving, all holy, all good, and because of that He calls us to the same reality: *to take responsibility and accountability for our life and actions by letting the Father in grace mold us increasingly into the image of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit.* God wants us to live the Truth, shown through our Catholic faith, in obedient love. But we can’t do it on our own - we need His ongoing daily help.

3. **Yes, we need a savior!** Jesus is the One who will remove our spiritual deafness to the Truth and enable us to live in His peace rather than fear. God gives all of us moments of “spiritual visitation”, as the saints call it, where He intervenes directly in our life to deepen our inner communion with Him. I remember at 17 when that happened to me after experiencing some deep suffering in my life. These visits often come in the wake of tragedy and suffering, for those are the things that most wake us up to spiritual reality. May we today ask Jesus to **visit** our souls to change them in holiness and to touch us as He did the deaf man. God bless you. †