

Courage to Proclaim

**Reverend Robert Gillelan
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 21, 2026**

Jesus said to his disciples, "Live faithfully. Do not be afraid. Do not deny me." But we have to go deeper, because Jesus is saying some truly amazing, astounding things in this Gospel, and we can kind of skip right over them because it sounds so familiar to us.

"Be faithful. Do not be afraid," which, by the way, is Jesus's most common commandment in the Gospels. And "Do not deny me." Okay, so we know all that. But what is Jesus really saying here? He is talking to his disciples about what discipleship is going to cost them. There is going to be a cost to their following Jesus, and this is in the context of persecution.

Right before this Gospel passage, Jesus is telling his disciples that people are going to hate them. He is sending them out to preach the Gospel, to preach the kingdom values. But he says, "People are going to hate you for that because they hate me." And why do they hate him? Because they think he is Beelzebul.

Beelzebul literally means "the master" or "the lord of the house." Some believe Jesus is actually the demon lord of the satanic kingdom on Earth. So, they believe that Jesus is demonic, evil incarnate, and anyone associated with him is also evil. If they don't believe that, they believe that he is, at the very least, in league with demons.

Jesus is telling his disciples that when they go out and preach, people are going to think they are evil, and there is going to be pushback. There is going to be hostility in proclaiming this message. So, they are going to have to be courageous. "Do not be afraid." Jesus says, "I have your back. I am going to

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be with you."

They need to be courageous in order to preach this message because there is going to be a lot of opposition. Then, Jesus puts a very fine point on it, and this is where it gets pretty amazing. Jesus says, "Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body. Be afraid of the one who can cast both body and soul into Gehenna."

Now, stop and think a little about what that means. How many of us are afraid of people who can kill us? Probably everyone, right? Jesus is saying, "Don't be afraid that when you go out there and preach this message, you might get killed, because that is the reality. That is the world I am sending you into—a world where, when you preach this message, someone might kill you. But don't be afraid of that person. Be afraid of God, who can damn your souls to Gehenna, who can cast body and soul into the fires of hell. Have a healthy, reverential respect for God, but do not fear men."

Another fine point he makes is this: as you are going out there and proclaiming the message and risking martyrdom, make sure you don't deny me, because if you deny me on Earth, I am going to deny you on Judgment Day. Yeah, that puts a different spin on everything, doesn't it?

Jesus is very, very serious about the mission of these twelve. He needs them to go out and proclaim his kingdom, or it won't get done. He is giving them a reality check that as his followers—as his disciples become apostles—they are the ones to spread the kingdom of God on Earth. He says, "Don't be afraid. I have your back."

I think that is the situation we find ourselves in today. We really have found ourselves in it for the past 2,000 years. It can be very, very hard to be a Catholic, hard to live Christian values in this world—very hard. We often face opposition.

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I want to read to you something that Cardinal George of Chicago once wrote. I think this was about 30 years ago, so he was very prophetic. Cardinal George wrote regarding being a leader in the Catholic Church and facing opposition and hardship: "I expect to die in bed. My successor will die in prison, and his successor will die a martyr in the public square. And his successor will pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization."

That is why we have the vocation of living our discipleship, following Christ, to rebuild civilization, to reform society by seasoning it. Remember, we are the salt of the earth. That is the seasoning: seasoning society with kingdom values. Jesus says, "In doing that, you are going to face opposition and hardship, but don't be afraid. I have your back. Do it in good times when it's easy. Do it in hard times when it's really hard. But I need you to do it."

This is why we come here every Sunday: to hear that word of inspiration and reassurance, and to receive the Eucharist to help us with the courage we need to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in thought, word, and deed. So today, let's pray for that courage, that we will be reminded that Jesus has our backs. Let's keep in mind his most common refrain, his most common command: "Be not afraid."

Homily text prepared from an audio transcript. Minor transcription variations may occur.