

He cares for the sparrow



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

**Matthew 10:24-39**

Jesus summoned the twelve and sent them out with the following instruction: 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

## Commentary

The passage from Matthew today begins with both warning and reassurance. Matthew uses the words of Jesus to warn disciples that as surely as night follows day, commitment to him will lead to persecution. This is important, following Jesus does not mean that life will be 'hunky dory.'

There are some distortions of Christianity which proclaim material blessing will follow those who have faith. Some other faiths teach that as spiritual faith grows so physical and material blessings will follow as a reward.

Jesus has no part with this at all. Followers must recognise that committed disciples walk into the fire of persecution. The phrase 'the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church' was coined to express how those early Christians spilled their blood for faith in Jesus. For us these words may sound ridiculous, we do not have to suffer for our faith, indeed Christianity for some means a good social life and new friends. But, this is not the case everywhere. There are Christians today who are persecuted and killed for their faith. The words of Jesus from today's reading 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul' might ring a little hollow for us, but we should be aware of the fact that many Christians are today killed for nothing more than faith in Christ.

We should not fear because of God's compassionate love. In Luke 12:6, Jesus speaks of five sparrows sold for two pennies. Matthew speaks of two sparrows sold for one penny. This is like Tesco, 'buy four get one free' The person who spends two pennies receives an extra sparrow thrown in, as if it had no value at all. God cares even for that apparently worthless sparrow. The God who cares for a trivial bird also cares about our trivia -- even the number of hairs on our head, surely a helpful thought for those with receding hairlines!

Jesus calls his disciples to "take up the cross and follow me." For us this is a remote metaphor, but Jesus' hearers had seen men take up their cross. They knew that when this happened and the man went off with a group of Roman soldiers, he was on a one-way journey. He would not be back. Thus, for them, taking up the cross stood for the utmost in renunciation of the claims of self.' By the time that this Gospel was written, Christians were familiar not only with the cross of Jesus but also with crosses borne by Christians on their way to martyrdom. Jesus' promise is that "those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

We live in a "What's in it for me!" kind of world where the focus is on what we can get rather than what we can give. Truly happy people are those who are who live for something larger than themselves. The endless pursuit of happiness achieves only broken relationships and unfulfilled dreams. Jesus promises that it will be quite different for those who "lose their life for my sake."

## Prayers

Grant to me, O Lord, a humble, lowly and quiet heart. Give to my waking hours patience, kindness and tenderness of soul. Let all my words, my works and my thoughts be overshadowed by the gift of your most Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen. *Thomas More, 1478-1535*