

“BE NOT AFRAID!” Matt 10:31

*Homily of His Eminence, Peter Ebere Cardinal Okpaleke on the 12th
Sunday of Year A, June 21, 2026 at Holy Name Catholic Church,
Nashville, Tennessee*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Preamble

I am glad to visit your community again. I shared the Eucharist with you on June 18, 2023. That was three years and three days ago. We thank God, who has kept us alive, and pray for the happy repose of those who were here on that occasion but are now, hopefully with God. May they rest in peace – Amen.

I thank Bishop Mark Spalding for the permission to celebrate with you. I shared some wonderful time with him on Friday. I thank your pastor, Rev. Fr. Theo for his ministry and his sacrifices. I thank all of you for the faith we share.

We thank God for all the Fathers – biological and spiritual – as we celebrate Father’s Sunday. We pray God to help them become fathers after the mind of Christ and to strengthen our faith in His love for us to banish our fears and anxieties.

2. Fear and Anxiety

Fathers’ Sunday reminds me of something from my childhood. I remember feeling uneasy during those few evenings when my father came home late. This was immediately replaced by a sense of peace, security, and calmness whenever he returned. In hindsight, I realize that I had an implicit trust in him. I felt he could handle any and every threat and overcome any challenge without flinching. Therefore, his presence brought about peace and security.

Now I am an adult. I have become painfully aware that even adults face many challenges. Adults – including parents and grand-parents – can

be confused. They can be worried, frightened and even anxious. Now, I know that some adults are on antidepressants to help them manage their anxiety. Some adults are frightened by several things that they perceive as threats and dangers to their way of life or to their lives. Some adults are afraid of isolation from friends and family as well as loneliness in old age. Some are afraid of falling sick and having to depend on others, or moving to a nursing home. Some others are afraid of losing their spouse to death. Some worry about their own death, etc. We are all afraid of one thing or another. Some of us already suffer from anxiety and panic attacks. The Gospel today is therefore good news for all of us. It addresses our fears.

3. “Do not Be Afraid”

The Gospel today tells us what to fear, on the one hand, and what not to fear, on the other hand. It also gives us reasons why we should fear what it presents as worthy of fear and why we should not fear what it says we should not fear. On a deeper level, however, the consoling message of the Gospel is that we are not alone. God is with us. We are infinitely loved by God and are of incalculable value. That is why we should not fear, be worried or paralysed, or enter into the fight, freeze, or flee mode in the face of uncertainties, dangers, and challenges.

4. Emmanuel – God is with Us. We are Never Alone

At Christmas, we celebrate that God is with Us – Emmanuel. At the end of the earthly life of God, who took human form and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, he promised to remain with the Church and with us, till the end of time (Matt 28:20). This awareness is supposed to guide our everyday life. God is with us: “In God we live, in God we move, in God we have our being.” This is how St. Paul presents our relationship with God (Acts 17:28). Through the prophet Isaiah, (49:16), God tells us: “Look, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands!” God is our loving Father. We are invited to rediscover and develop a childlike trust in God.

As I said above, I always felt secure and protected when my father was home in the evenings. This is a non-tangible gift fathers give to their children. Fathers, please, do not deny your family this gift.

5. Reverential Fear of God

In as much as God is with us and cares for us, we are to have reverential fear of Him. It is for want of a better word that we speak of fear in this connection. What is meant is a recognition that God is qualitatively different from us. God is God, and human beings are human beings. God is almighty. God is the creator, and we are creatures. God's ways are not our ways, and God's thoughts are not our thoughts (Is 55:8). Because we know that God loves us, we are invited to trust Him even when, from our human perspective, it seems that He is silent.

In the first reading, we have the story of Jeremiah, who trusted God's presence and support despite his sufferings. He faced stiff opposition from his friends and former allies after his call to the prophetic ministry. He told them things that they did not want to hear. He announced the divine intention to them. Instead of trusting and accepting these, they ganged up against Jeremiah. They stopped being his friends and isolated him.

God's messages do not always conform to human expectations. Indeed, they often go contrary to them. God loves us. God may allow us to go through unpleasant experiences – sickness, loneliness, death of a spouse, and other forms of difficulties. In such situations, we may be tempted to despair, to grow bitter or focus on our inadequacy. Instead, like Jeremiah, we are invited to see that God is with us. Though He may seem to be silent, He cares deeply. In times when things do not work out as expected and we are tempted to allow fear and despair to take hold in our lives, remember the profound statement of faith made by St. Paul: “we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him” (Rom 8:28). Aware of this divine involvement, we can confidently say with the Psalmist: “Even if I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear, because you are there with your rod and your staff” (Ps 23:4).

6. Jesus is with Us in the Boats of our Lives - Conclusion

Let me end this reflection with the story of Jesus and his disciples. They were crossing the Sea of Galilee when they met a violent storm. Jesus was in the boat but asleep on the stern. The disciples were afraid and woke him up in these words: “Do you not care? We are perishing.” Jesus rebuked the wind, and the sea became calm again. We are often like the disciples. We have Jesus in the boats of our lives. In the face of difficulties, we react with fear. Today, we are invited to be aware of Jesus’ presence, always, even when he seems to be sleeping.

May the awareness of his presence, His love and care bring us peace, joy, and security. Peace be with you!