

## Twelfth Sunday A

Do not be afraid. How often do we hear those words? Jesus himself tells us at least twice in today's Gospel. The Bible constantly teaches us this salient truth. Why? Because we need courage to offset fear. We need courage to keep on going when there are addiction problems, money problems, health problems, relationship problems. Courage gives us reasons to believe that it will all work out. Courage gives us the ability to change our lives. Courage is vital to our salvation, so that we can remain faithful to our vocation and not to lose hope in heaven.

Note also how the Lord reminds us, as does the first reading from Jeremiah, that in spite of what is happening around you or to you, God will sort it out in the long run. Within that context we are also told that we should not be a self-appointed vigilante seeking justice here and now. In order to help us be patient, God reminds us that He is the just Judge and that everything now covered will be uncovered one day – it will be sorted by Him.

Does this not imply a sense of passivity? Not really. We should become inactive in being critical of others, when there is no just reason, but not uncritical in dealing with ourselves. Our number one enemy is not the person next door but rather the one we see in the mirror each day. We are the bent creatures. Bent is a C.S. Lewis term well described in his novel *Perelandra* about original innocence and the fall. His point is that each one of us is not true-to-type, we are enfeebled by our fallen nature. Often we forget that our nature is flawed. In the same way, that when one is on a walk and close to the trees that he forgets that he is also in a forest.

One domain that infects us all is our warped sense of sensitivity. Are we not all prone to be too vulnerable at times? Are we not a trifle too emotive and thin skinned? Fine natures like fine vases, after all, readily crack! Do we not feign 'poor-me' when we are the ones who suffer from envy, ungratified vanity or flouted self-will. To safeguard our precious 'thin skin' we pretend that we have been hurt and it often wins. Others quickly give in. But note that they give in not because they don't know what is really wrong with us, but because they have long known all too well our nature. Is courage the best course of action for those with 'thin skins'? So be tough on self first. Toughen up, one might say, get a thick skin and move on. At the same time, be consoled that you belong to that class or hardy souls who know that: 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going?'

One soul not bent on being overly sensitive and most tough within was St Thomas More. At 57 yrs old in 1535 he was executed after being tortured in the Tower of London. We all know the story of Thomas More, as Chancellor of England, during the reign of King Henry VIII, who would not concede to the royal decree regarding Henry's divorce and remarriage. Henry filled with lust and power, eventually had six wives, and when the Catholic Church would not change to concede to his illicit marriage, he changed the Church and appointed himself as head of the English or Anglican one. Thomas, however, who was once a friend and loyal subject of the crown, known for being a just and honourable statesman, could not betray his conscience. His mental toughness was surely tested when while enduring tremendous hardship in the Tower, his beloved daughter Meg was permitted to visit to remonstrate with him in the hope that he might sway from his convictions. After all, had not all the Catholic bishops conceded to Henry's will – all except the Bishop of Rochester, St John Fisher, who also was murdered in that same year. Imagine how difficult it was for him to remain calm and not emotional, or thin skinned, in those circumstances. At such times, much grace was given to him so as to bolster his will, and likewise we too receive actual graces so as not to be afraid. When he was being unjustly executed, he exclaimed that he was: 'The King's good servant, but God's first!' Some time ago, Saint John Paul named St Thomas More as Patron for statesman and politicians so that through his intercession they too may be thick skinned and not prey to passing fancies, or thin skinned neurotics, in the media.