

No Pressure, or: Why I Cannot Withdraw

Sermon on June 20/21, 2026, at St. Sebastian Cathedral
12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
Matt 10:26–33

From the gospel:

²⁶Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. ²⁷What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's knowledge. ³⁰Even all the hairs of your head are counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ³²Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father. ³³But whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father.

"No pressure," is what I want to say back to Jesus! Because he is putting a whole lot of pressure on us with his words. He is urging us—you and me—to act. We must not withdraw from this mission that he has given to you and to me.

Dear brothers and sisters, in the Gospel through which he speaks to us today, Jesus is a driver. He seems to want to close off all excuses. Again and again, he speaks about how we should not be afraid. We are meant to speak about his message. And he is convinced that this message—this Good News, this Gospel—cannot be stopped. Shout it from the housetops, he says to you and to me. From where everyone can hear you. From way up high, from where everyone can see you. Speak, do not remain silent. And do not be afraid if

there is a headwind. Do not be afraid when people point fingers at you because you are not quiet, because you speak up. Because you acknowledge Jesus, even when there is hostility, rejection, and discrimination.

And then there is this final sentence: "Whoever denies me..." No pressure; yet I feel pushed against the wall by this Jesus and his total radicalism. Granted, he says: Do not be afraid! Yet it feels like this Jesus is overwhelming me. With his urging, his pushing, his pulling.

But: Why is he so radical? Why does he challenge us—you and me—so much?

The words the Lord spoke to us today in the Gospel—*Do not be afraid! Speak! Do not fear for your life! Do not deny me!*—these words fall within the instruction of the disciples whom he called and sent out. He explains to them what they are supposed to do. But why did he call them? Why does he fire them up so much? Why did he call you? Why is he firing you up so much?

We find the motive in the trigger for these callings, as Matthew presents it to us in his Gospel—a few verses before today's passage. It says there: At that time, *"[Jesus] went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity."* (Matt 9:35) Jesus proclaimed and healed. And at this point follows a sentence that reveals the motive and explains the pressure the Lord is generating today. For Matthew writes:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matt 9:36)

Jesus had compassion: compassion means to be moved in one's innermost being. The people Jesus met touched him deeply. And what did he see? Many people who were weary

and exhausted. What sounds quite harmless in some translations—*weary and exhausted*—means in the literal sense: painfully struck down and rejected; painfully struck down and rejected. This fate of the people touches Jesus in his innermost core.

And that is the impulse to draw others into his mission. In the awareness that helpers are needed—the harvest is plentiful. That is why he sends his people out—sends you and me out. Out of a deep compassion for the people who are struck down and rejected. This is where the Good News is meant to be healing. A Good News that is spoken—as Francis of Assisi said—if necessary, even with words.

Look around in your world! Perceive the people! See their lives! Have compassion—in your innermost being—for where people are struck down and rejected. Let yourself be driven by this impulse. And then you will realize why you—exactly you—healing action brooks no delay. Why you must speak! Why you must go! Why you cannot duck away! Let your heart speak, follow this impulse!

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps we now understand Jesus' motives. Perhaps we understand where the motivation for his pressure comes from. But the feeling that he challenges us so deeply will probably remain. Perhaps also the feeling of being overwhelmed, which arises when our heart drives us to stand by the side of a weary, exhausted, struck-down, and rejected person. And you certainly know many such people.

An ancient author—John Cassian—wrote down a short prayer precisely for these situations of being overwhelmed. And I would like to give this to you as an encouragement—for the situations where you feel overwhelmed. You can pray it when you find yourself with your back against the wall, when the air gets thin, when the pressure rises. In those moments, pray: *O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me!*

And think of the words of today's Gospel: "So do not be afraid; you are worth so much more..." (cf. Matt 10:31)

O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me!

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