

Jesus is our Guardian (Homily, 23rd Sunday in OT, Father's Day)

Sunday 6 September 2020

Archbishop Peter A Comensoli

Homily: 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year A)

It's magpie breeding season. How do I know this? Not because I've been dive bombed by one, but because I've noticed while out on my walk that kids on their bikes have suddenly got those plastic ties sticking out of the tops of their helmets. It's a sure sign that vigilant magpie mums are on the watch and ready to swoop.

We all know that magpies make for excellent sentries. They are always looking around, checking their surroundings, watching for danger, ensuring their safety, protecting their young. They are the guardians above the neighbourhood, the sentries in our domestic skies. They know how to protect their own, and will do what is necessary to safeguard them.

We might hold in our minds this image, as we listen again to the words of the Lord to the Prophet Ezekiel: *I have appointed you as sentry to the House of Israel*. In the old days, a sentry or watchman was tasked to be the eyes and ears of protection at a city's gate. They signalled warning to the inhabitants when danger approached, and they were the first line of defence. But not all dangers can be seen or heard, not all are physical in nature. Some dangers – perhaps the worst of them – are more insidious, entering into our minds and hearts, undermining our moral compass and subverting our human dignity. A virus of fear will always be more threatening to our common good than a virus of microbes. A pandemic of neglect of one another is more harmful than a pandemic of sickness.

God saw that his People – the House of Israel – were in need of a sentry, a guardian, to stand firm at the door of their lives, in part to protect them from self-inflicted harm. They were in need of watchmen who would call out the threatening danger to their own wayward hearts. They had lost sight of God, and God's desire for their good, but God had not lost sight of them, and their care. And so, a sentry was needed to call out to the people in their danger, and to speak words to them that would defend and protect.

Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, is our Sentry for our salvation and eternal protection. He defended us on the cross against the power of evil. This threat remains present in so many ways today, especially when people are forgotten or left behind or wounded or neglected. Often, we are lulled into missing the threats that are around us, next to us or among us. We need Jesus, our eternal Guardian, to watch over us, and to speak words of warning and care into our hearts.

On this Father's Day, may every dad be encouraged to see that they have been called also to be God's sentries, God's guardians, at the door of their family. It is the great gift of Christian fathers to have that precious vocation of being witnesses of protective love and affection in their home. I know that this is an image of fatherhood that is not evident in every home, just as the spiritual fatherhood of the priesthood is not always present. But this does not mean we can't all do what we can to call out – and to be called out – what is good and needed and yearned for in every family, be it domestic or of a church nature.

The vigilant love of fathers, with tenderness and alertness, is something to be fostered and treasured. Our society is threatened in so many ways, and we need dads as our first defenders in love, goodness and protection. On this Father's Day, may St Joseph, that great witness to a guardianship of love and protection, be with all fathers – in our strengths and weaknesses – to show us the way to a Godly care of our families.

—

Archbishop Comensoli's Father's Day message