Eleventh Sunday of Year B

Fear is effective and useful – we should be afraid of losing what we value. It has been used well in the past when the Church has explained clearly to people how much stands to be lost by not living moral lives – what a rich inheritance will be lost for the sake of a short term gain.

It has been misused by the Church in the past as well – as a means of control – ‘Do exactly what we say or a fate of unimaginable horror awaits you’ and then a generous amount of time would be given to describing the horrors. I have encountered older people whose lives have been blighted by fear and guilt courtesy of the Church.

But I say again ‘Fear is effective and useful’. But it has to come second not first. If someone is a passing acquaintance we don’t fear the breakdown of our relationship with them. If they are dearer to us than our own selves then to lose them is the greatest dread of our lives. Fear of their loss prompts us to protect them, preserve them, nurture them.

The environment is dominating our readings today – visions of a peaceful, fruitful future – using images of nature – flourishing and harmonious. It is a vision we recognise – the mysterious growth of things – the interdependence of nature – its beautiful and delicate balance – and indeed our dependence on it for our survival. Fear that all this is under threat is now a motivating force in our world. We are all being forced to think about what we may lose. Pope Francis has written a very important encyclical about our impact on the natural world - Laudato Si. As Christians we are becoming that we have stewardship of God’s creation – and good stewards don’t squander their masters’ resources – they look after them with great care.

We are spending more time thinking about what we fear to lose if we continue rampaging through our planet at the rate we are doing. Do we spend enough time considering what we fear to lose if our religious lives and culture are eroded and ultimately destroyed? It is easy to speak in general terms that we need a spiritual dimension to life – that we value the place of the Gospel and the Sacraments in our lives. I think the time is coming when each of us will have to be more specific and identify what things are essential to us – what things we love – what would we be most afraid to lose. We need that fear – not fear as an oppressive deadly anxiety – but fear as a spur for action for change for commitment. And then WE will grow – and flourish in the courts of our God – still bearing fruit even when we are old!