

We live in a world at present where intimidation plays a significant role. We see it in the fear of terrorism, and in the threat of war; we see it in the menace of industrial mayhem, such as was posed on Tuesday by the head of the CMFEU to hound building inspectors, and we feel it is the disdain wherewith our Christian values about human life and marriage, for example, are scorned and belittled.

It is to all of these that Jesus is speaking when in today's Gospel he exhorts us not to be afraid, not to fear those who kill the body but who cannot kill the soul. We have a truth to share, a message of life, love and forgiveness that outweighs every other consideration, and we should not be afraid the share it.

It is a message about how valued we are in God's sight, and what we are worth to him. That is why Jesus tells us not to undervalue ourselves by letting ourselves be intimidated. Even the life of a sparrow is important to God, so why should we consider ourselves and all we believe in of a lesser worth?

Intimidation is, more often than not, a question of make-belief, and when we have the courage of our convictions and bear witness to our faith, in the long run it will prevail, even if, at times, it comes at a heavy cost.

Think, for example, of Archbishop Oscar Romero and Martin Luther King who died for their convictions, but also of Nelson Mandela whose courage and perseverance overcome the scandal of apartheid in South Africa, even to the extent of serving as its President.

As with them, it is what is of the greater merit that needs to be our goal, rather than present comfort, and that is something we can't achieve without God's help, and by placing Him and his designs at the centre of our lives.

May we continue to grow in our belief of his presence within and beside us.