

## PENTECOST: A TIME TO BE FILLED WITH GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT

**Sixth Sunday after Pentecost**

**Proper 7**

**June 22, 2008**

**Jeremiah 20:7-13**

**Psalms 69:7-10 [11-15] 16-18**

**Romans 6:1b-11**

**Matthew 10:24-39**

### **His Eye Is On the Sparrow**

*His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know He watches me.*

*(Civilla Durfee Martin, 1905)*

These comforting words aptly reflect God's steadfast love for us as it is recorded in this week's Gospel reading from Matthew. Just as God knows each and every sparrow that falls, so too does God, our loving Creator, watch over us. These words of assurance, however, are preceded by Jesus' description of the harsh realities of discipleship (10:16-23) – betrayal, derision, arrest, persecution. "Everyone will hate you because of me," Jesus says. "But if you remain faithful until the end, you will be saved" (10:22, *CEV*).

To be a faithful follower of Jesus is no trivial undertaking. The cost of discipleship is indeed high and requires unswerving commitment and utmost loyalty to Jesus – loyalty that may even lead to divisiveness within families (10:34-39). But Jesus tells us not to be afraid; words he utters three times (10:26, 28, 31). We are not to be afraid of those who can kill our mortal bodies because they cannot kill our souls (10:28). Those who are faithful in mission will be saved.

Jesus assures us that we are of value to God. Sparrows, birds of little monetary value (10:29), are known to God. How much more, then, will be God's love and concern for us? Hardship, danger, and risk are experienced by many Christians around the world today. But God is with them in the midst of such difficulties. And Jesus, our advocate, promises that, "if you tell others you belong to me, I will tell my Father in heaven you are my followers" (10:32, *CEV*).

In the midst of persecution, the Lord's prophet, Jeremiah, remained steadfast in his trust in God and was able to profess:

But you, LORD, are a mighty soldier, standing at my side. ...  
I sing praises to you, LORD. (20:11a, 13a, *CEV*)

The way of discipleship is the way of the cross (10:38), and the suffering and persecution that it entails. To take up the cross is to embrace discipleship – rejecting the standards set by the world and participating in an alternative way of life rooted in God’s justice. Faithful followers are vindicated in the final judgment. This week’s Gospel text concludes with both a warning and words of assurance from Jesus: “If you try to save your life, you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will surely find it” (10:39, *CEV*).

As twenty-first century disciples, we may be reluctant to share our faith boldly with others. What prevents us? Fear? Rejection? Ridicule? Jesus tells us not to be afraid. The apostle Paul reminds us, “Christ Jesus has given life to you, and you live for God” (Romans 6:11b, *CEV*). Yes, God’s eye is on the sparrow; and we *know* God watches us.

This week’s Reflection was prepared by Barbara Bernstengel, who serves on the staff of the American Bible Society as Director of the Education Unit in the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship.

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in:** **Brazil** – With thanks to God for the record distribution of almost 5.6 million Bibles and for being able to reach 51 million people through social programs, and with prayers for activities connected with Year of the Bible and the Bible Society’s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary; **Suriname** – With prayers for continued Bible work in **Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana**, and with prayers for safety and that the Lord will provide sturdy vehicles which are urgently needed in order to promote the Scriptures in remote areas, and with thanks to God for the recording of the Sranan Tongo Audio New Testament, and with prayers for its impact and that the name of Jesus will be glorified; **Netherlands Antilles and Aruba** – With thanks to God for the success of the Bible World project, for its popularity with school children, and for the volunteers working on the Bible Bus, and with prayers for new projects, particularly the Youth Leaders’ Bible Seminar in July and a program about domestic violence run in partnership with a women’s center.

**Activity Corner:** “Sparrows and Pennies”

Supplies needed: Bible; bird pattern; construction paper (brown or assorted colors); pencils/pens; scissors; pennies.

Gather members of your household and read Psalm 69. Discuss the various hardships the psalm writer experiences. In what ways does the psalm writer exhibit trust in God?

Ask each one to trace and cut out two or more “sparrows.” Put all the sparrows in a basket or bowl. During family devotion time each day, ask each member of your household to “buy” two sparrows for a penny. Collect all the pennies in a container. At the end of the week, count the pennies and discuss what could be purchased for that amount today. Reflect on how, in many parts of the world, people live in poverty and, if they are able to find work, may earn only pennies a day. Explore websites for information about global poverty and learn about actions members of your household can take to alleviate world hunger. Conclude by singing “His Eye Is on the Sparrow” or one of your favorite hymns.