

12th Sunday

1. This is a most consoling Gospel, it seems to me. Here Jesus tells us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's knowledge, and we are more valuable than many sparrows. Then, to enforce his point, Jesus adds the image of the hair count: "Even all the hairs of your head are counted." That won't take too long, some of us might say in jest, because we know how thin our hair is. Not to mention those who are "hair deprived." What does God do with them? How does he count them?

2. But we understand. Or do we? Can we believe that the infinite, almighty, eternal, all-powerful, omniscient God can be so concerned with us? Can we believe that God is like a mother ape picking the flees off her offspring, bent over her young in care and concern? For me personally, the way that mother animals care for their young has always been a reason for believing in a merciful and loving God. It makes me believe that their care and concern for their young manifests the fact that the laws and instincts which govern the world point to the fact that its creator is loving and caring and knows, as Jesus tells us, when a sparrow dies and counts the hairs of our heads.

3. In the 4th week of his Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius of Loyola asks those making the Exercises to reflect on the many gifts which God gives them. Ignatius begins by recalling the gifts of creation, that is, the gift of our wonderful world in all its magnificent beauty, in all its complexity and abundance, in all its ordered diversity. But then Ignatius reminds us that God did not simply create the world at one moment in the past, at its beginning. No, the world is sustained by God at every moment. God is the energy which keeps everything going. If God took a break, everything would cease to be. The world would disappear. And since that is the case, Ignatius describes God as the God who is always working for us. God is God the Worker.

4. What should be the result of such reflection? Ignatius hopes that it will make those making the Exercises grateful to God and inspire in them the desire to return God's favors by offering themselves to God in turn. He suggests this prayer to them: "Take, Lord, receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me; I return it to You. All is Yours; dispose of it according to Your will. Give me only Your love and Your grace, for that is enough for me."

5. Let that be enough for us today—this thought of God as the Worker God who is constantly laboring on our behalf, God whose Holy Spirit is described by the poet Gerard Manly Hopkins as a mother bird who “bent over the world broods with warm breast and with ah bright wings.” And let this understanding of God produce two responses in us: gratitude and fearlessness. We give thanks to God for the divine care and concern poured out over us. And knowing that God is for us, we fear no one. No one can separate us from the love of God except ourselves. Therefore, if we remain faithful, the divine love will shield and protect us each step of our journey. More than that, it will make us fearless in confronting the evil in ourselves and in others.