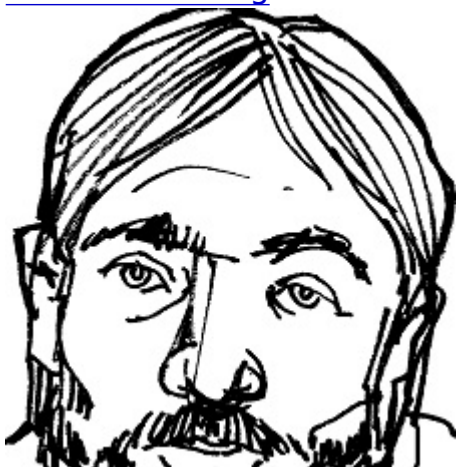


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by Pat Marrin

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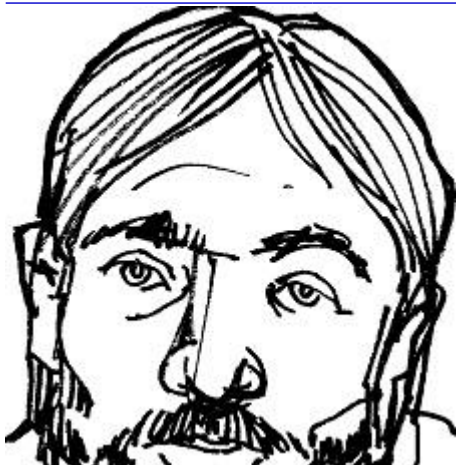
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“Not a hair on your head will be destroyed” (Luke 21:19).

Dan 5:1-6, 13-14, 16-17, 23-28; Luke 21:12-19.

Jesus must have observed the power that fear has over people, because his admonition not to be afraid is repeated often in the Gospels. In its extreme forms, anxiety can take over a person's life, setting limits on what they do where they go, who they associate with. Fear is the basis for prejudice, the threshold we cannot cross even to gain something we really want. Fear paralyzes every good intention and can move us to cowardice in a crisis.

Since anything is possible in life, there is no real remedy for the fearful except trust. Jesus tells the crowd not to be afraid of persecution or threat, not because these things won't occur, but because he will always be with them, guiding them and caring about them. He uses one of the most intimate images possible in promising us that not a hair on our heads will be destroyed. In Luke 12:7, he says that every hair on our head is numbered.

A parent or lover understands this kind of intimacy. Sitting next to a sick child, a mother touches that child's hair in silent prayer. Lovers caress each other's hair as infinitely precious, and they may even carry a lock of it as a reminder just how much they care for everything about their beloved.

Jesus' words were part of a deep tradition of biblical affirmation. During a time of persecution, Luke reminds his community of Jesus' promise that their very existence is rooted in God's knowledge of us and love for them.

Psalms 39 says: “O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.”

No one is spared suffering in this life or the inevitable experience of physical decline and death. So, Jesus' reassurance must go beyond mere bodily preservation. He invited his disciples to share his own journey through death to new life. What strengthened the church was not just the promise of resurrection, but also the example of Jesus' embrace of the whole human condition and his courage in facing

death as an act of sacrificial love.

As St. Paul reminds us, “Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:38). If we witness this to each other, we will go forward day by day without fear.

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