

It is clearly in our nature to rate and rank others. When Jesus tells us today that we are of more value than sparrows, we're probably not surprised, but we may wonder about the hierarchy of creation. We're worth more than sparrows, and sparrows are certainly worth more than mosquitoes, but since we tend to rank successful philanthropists over serial killers, perhaps we wonder if all of those sparrows are equal in the eyes of God.

Consider this:

Thirty-five-year-old Karen, is driving to visit a friend of hers in hospital; a friend with whom she usually plays tennis each week. As always, she knows that the biggest hassle will be finding parking space within walking distance of the hospital. She prays that God will provide her with one. As she enters the parking lot, she notices another car trolling for a spot. Oh, how frustrating! But then, just ahead of her, a vehicle's back up lights come on and she grabs that spot. Once parked, she pauses to thank God for his favor.

Also visiting the hospital that day is 77-year-old Olga. She prayed for God's help to get her through another difficult day. Her husband is struggling with an infection following bypass surgery. Olga's car is the one Karen outmaneuvered to grab the last parking spot. Olga spent another 15 minutes out in the full parking lot, trolling until another vehicle finally left. It is a long walk to the hospital entrance, but Olga remembered to bring her cane that day so she moves slowly but safely toward her husband's room.

Recently in our own province fires raged and destroyed many homes. Some people lost everything and others were spared any loss. Fortunately there was no loss of human life. I would bet many prayers were made when the fires were raging out of control.

So, did God favour Karen over Olga? Does this mean that Karen's faith is stronger? And what about all the prayers made during the fires. Sometimes it does appear that God hears the prayers of some and not others.

But faith is not supposed to be like an insurance policy against tragedy. Bad things do happen to good people. And sometimes people we would consider to be "lesser" appear to have blest lives.

Today, Jesus reminds us: Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Jesus wants us to remember that we are precious to God. Earthly powers can't take that away. Our sinfulness can't take it away either. Even when we feel alone, we will not BE alone.

Sparrows will still fall, our hair will still thin, but God is there always, fully aware of what is going on. In times of peace and times of struggle... In times of laughter and times of tears... In times of persecution as well as times of apathy. Contrary to what some believe, one cannot judge the quality of a Christian life by what troubles come upon the person.

There is just one guarantee, one truth on which we can rest secure: God loves us and is with us no matter what. God was with Karen as she grabbed that first parking spot, and God was with Olga as she parked her car, grabbed her cane, and went to her husband's bedside. God is with all those affected by the fires here and everywhere they are happening.

God's love for us over arches and undergirds all things and is always there. God never wearies, never sleeps, even when it may seem like God is napping or vacationing because our urgent prayers may not be answered as quickly as we had expected. God's Holy Spirit is with us always, accompanying us, advocating for us, and helping us to see that even the worst of circumstances can be transformed by blessings.

Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Alleluia!