

19th Sunday A (Matt 14:22-33)

Our Gospel today tells a story of faith and fear. The setting is on the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night. The disciples are in a boat trying to cross the sea but a storm arises. In the wee hours of the morning they see Jesus coming toward them, walking on the water. "Is it a ghost," as they cry out in fear? And Jesus says, "It is I, don't be afraid." Peter needed more assurance than that. Lord, if it's you tell me to come to you across the water." "Come," says Jesus. And Peter began to walk toward Jesus on the water, but that adventure didn't last long, and he began to sink. But Jesus came to the rescue, the storm ceased, and the disciples confessed their faith in Jesus as the Son of God.

What has this story got to do with you and me? I've never been caught in a storm at sea, and probably none of you have either. This story isn't about raging storms or boats on the verge of sinking. It was written to a Church that was having a hard time, perhaps not unlike a time such as our own. They were fighting to hang on to their faith, and that was hard. This may be a difficulty at times for all who are followers of Christ. At times we may be like Simon Peter, with faith so strong that we could walk on water, at other times, fear may rule us and challenge our faith so that we may be on the verge of sinking.

This is in reality, a modern parable, a parable of the struggle between faith and fear. Human life is essentially hard, and often tragic. Christians are forced to leave their ancient homes in Iraq or Syria or face death, Israelis and Palestinians slaughter innocent people, gang warfare causes the deaths of young people, even in our own cities, and we are caught in the struggle between good and evil. Parents struggle to raise children in a society that is often hostile and non supportive. A wife or husband says, "I don't love you anymore and I want out," or spousal abuse makes one feel fearful and trapped, or the doctor says, "The tests don't look good," or the boss says, "We don't need your services anymore."

Hard times are the birthplace of true believers in God. Simon Peter is a typical example of this. As he was about to be swallowed by the waves, in desperation he cried out for help. And the Lord reached out and saved him. Great faith grows in the soil of doubt and despair. At Calvary, Peter almost went under as he denied knowing Jesus. But, sunk in failure, he became the spiritual rock on which Jesus built his Church. Jesus himself on Calvary cried, out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And that was a time when his faith shook the world. Out of great despair, we can come to know great faith. We can sink in despair or we can reach out to Christ who is always ready to pull us up, as he asks us, "Why do you fear?" He is in the storm with us and will never abandon us, for he loves us with a passion and he will never let us go.

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