



## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time August 7, 2011 A

### SEEKING CALM IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM

Reflecting on today's Gospel, Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

*If taken literally, the Gospel story has little or no relevance for us. But it seems that Matthew meant it to be taken symbolically. The boat represents the Church; the winds and the waves stand for the persecutions that had been let loose on the early Christians. Jesus is not with them physically; he is in heaven, praying to the Father. However, in their hour of need he makes his presence felt among them, thus calming their fears and bringing them peace. Understood like this, the story has great relevance for us.*

*Some people think that if you have enough faith life will be all plain sailing for you. But this is not so. Faith doesn't shield us from the hard knocks of life and death.*

*We see this in the case of the great prophet, Elijah (First Reading). Elijah was undoubtedly a man of faith. But because of his opposition to idolatry, Queen Jezebel wanted to kill him. So he fled to the desert and took refuge in a cave. A beaten and broken man, he just wanted to die. However, in the cave he experienced the presence of God. And strengthened by that experience, he was able to go on.*

*We see the same thing in the lives of the early Christians. They too were people of faith. Nevertheless, when they encountered persecution, they thought that the Lord had abandoned them, and their faith began to wilt. However, they discovered that even though the Lord was not with them physically, he was with them, and could still help them. Hence, their faith revived, and they were able to face their trials and dangers.*

*The example of Peter is especially enlightening. The story of Peter sinking and being saved by Jesus is a strange one. Yet it represents something that really did happen to Peter. It is a reference to his failure during the passion, and his restoration after the resurrection.*

*Initially he is full of faith as he sets out across the water. We remember his brave words at the last supper: 'Lord, I'm ready to die with you if necessary.' but then came doubt and cowardice, and he begins to sink, so that Jesus has to rescue him. Peter represents the typical disciple of the present time, caught between faith and doubt.*

*It is comforting for us to see that at times the apostles and early Christians were weak and fearful. In other words, they were just like us. At the start of an adventure we may be convinced that we are full of faith. However, as we go along, and difficulties arise, we discover that we have very little faith. It is then that we have to turn to the Lord for help. It's in our weak moments that we experience the strength of God. If we never felt ourselves going under, then we'd never know the rescuing power of God.*

*Faith doesn't save us from trials and tribulations. What it does is give us strength to face them. The person who has faith has a source of strength and inspiration, especially when trouble strikes. It's not we who keep the faith, it's the faith that keeps us. 'A person with a grain of faith in God never loses hope.' (Gandhi).*

*The person without faith, on the other hand, has nowhere to turn when trouble strikes. He/she is utterly alone, with neither comfort nor inspiration.*

*The Gospel story shows us the power of faith. It shows us what Jesus always does for his people, when the wind is contrary and they are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storms of life. To those with faith, Jesus is not a ghost from the past. He is the Son of God, who is present with us, and whose grace upholds us when things are too much for us.*

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### Water walkers bring us peace

Patrice Tuohy writes:

*We all have someone in our lives whom we think walks on water because of something he or she did for us or a loved one: the doctor who saved a life; the cop who came to the rescue; the counselor who helped turn things around; the friend who lent a helping*

hand; the lawyer who restored a good name; the neighbor with a generous spirit; the foe with a forgiving heart.

One thing all of these water walkers have in common is the ability to bring order to a chaotic situation. The seas of our minds and hearts are rolling; we reach out; allow ourselves to trust; and are offered a sign of peace.

Being dazed and confused, frightened and in pain is not how Jesus wants us to live. Think of the words of Jesus we repeat each time we gather at Eucharist: "My peace I leave you; my peace I give to you."

Remember Christ's peace is yours for the taking. That is the miracle of Christian living. Problems and challenges don't disappear but our fear of them does. Instead of Peter's panic, "Lord, save me!" our response can be modeled after Peter's faith, "Lord, command me to come to you." we can remain calm even in the midst of chaos. We can, in fact, walk on water.

Believe that, and you will have plenty of peace to offer others.

**"Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by."** (First Reading)

Reflecting on all three of today's readings, Alice Camille writes:

I'm a big fan of the miracle workers Elijah and Elisha. It's hard for most of us to tell them apart, since our lectors in church often pronounce their names the same! Their stories in Kings also sound remarkably alike. The main way they seem distinguished is that Elisha, the heir to Elijah's ministry, was given a double portion of Elijah's power and goes on to do twice as many miracles as his predecessor did.

The story of Elijah's encounter with God on the mountain is a stand-alone, though. Nothing Elisha experienced could compare. What's most memorable is how big turns small: We move from mighty wind, earthquake, and fire—the usual sings of theophany—to a tiny whispering sound. And though we expect God to manifest the divine presence on a grand scale, the actual arrival is into stillness. Where does that put God in your day?

**"My conscience and the Holy Spirit bear witness that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart."** (Second Reading)

Two thousand years ago, the Lord passed by in flesh and blood. Many heard him. Some actually listened to him. Nearly all deserted him before the end. But eventually, even one who hated him and sought to

wipe out his name grew to love him. That was Saint Paul, and his love for Christ Jesus was equaled only by the anguish he felt for those who could not accept him as their Lord.

Flash forward to today, where Jesus comes our way in word and sacrament, in Spirit, and in the least of our sisters and brothers. How often does he pass by without acceptance? We may be distracted when Scripture is proclaimed in church, spiritually unprepared to receive the Eucharist. We may block the Spirit's movement in us or refuse to respond to the lowly. In these ways and more, we close a door on grace.

**"During the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward the disciples walking on the sea."** (Gospel)

Since I was little, I've been waiting for a miracle like this. I'm primed for one, totally pumped for it. I love the pictures of Jesus walking on the sea, as serene and steady as if he were making his way across a living room carpet. The terror on the faces of the disciples amuses me: Heck, I'd be smiling, waiting for Jesus to invite me to come out of the boat for a stroll on the waves. Hopefully, someone left shivering in the boat would have the presence of mind to lift up a cell phone to take the picture.

What's wrong with this picture? Well, if I'm so anxious to go for a Galilean trust walk, what am I waiting for? Our society is full of turbulence no one has the guts to cross. Why don't I stroll across racial lines or economic ones? I don't even like to cross political lines at the average parish dinner. What am I saving all my courage for? Jesus is inviting us all to get out of the boat today.

**Reflection question:** How might Jesus be inviting you to show courage at this time?

Have a blessed week,

