

12B 2021 SML
MK 4:35-41

Whenever you open the Bible, there is always the story on the surface (what you read: this week, the stilling of the storm), and there is always a deeper, more spiritual meaning to the story that delves below the surface.

This evening's (morning's) gospel took place on the Sea of Galilee, which was notorious for its storms which came literally out of the blue with shattering and terrifying suddenness. The voyager across the lake was always liable to encounter such storms. This is the story on the surface, but there is always a deeper, spiritual meaning to the story that delves below the surface.

The friendship that Our Lord shares with His disciples is the model for the relationship He wants for each one of us. He wants to be the voice that steers through every situation, the peace that settles troubled hearts, the One who is steady in the storm.

Think of the analogy of a hurricane. In the midst of turbulence, destruction and the overwhelming force of the storm, there is the "eye of the hurricane," a time of peace, calm

and serenity. For the believer, the eye of the hurricane is his relationship with, and their trust in Our Blessed Lord.

So on the surface, this evening's gospel is the miracle of the Stilling of the Storm, but below the surface is the deeper, more spiritual meaning of the gospel, which is this. In the midst of:

- ✓ the storms of life,
- ✓ the winds of unpredictability,
- ✓ setback,
- ✓ crisis,
- ✓ tragedy,
- ✓ or just the plain daily grind

that can be overwhelming, is the harbor of inner peace, "the eye of the hurricane," the calm and serenity provided by a relationship with, and trust in Our Blessed Lord, that will always see us through. All of us have heard this lesson, this logic hundreds of times, but it is a lesson, a logic so hard to put into practice. But I can say, that the older I get, the easier it becomes.

In fact, to drive lesson home, the lesson is taught not just once, but twice. This evening's/morning's gospel is taken from Mark Chapter 4. Yet in Mark Chapter 6, there is a second

miracle of Jesus stilling the storm. The details are different but what's common to both miracles is Jesus is in the boat with them. He's in the boat with them. So the deeper meaning for us believers then tells us that Jesus is in the boat with us with us with the waves on the left and the wakes on the right.

Let me share with you a story I read about a father who finds yet another stray dog in his front yard. I've used this story in a previous homily, but because of the analogy made at the end of it, it bears repeating:

I've seen that look at least a dozen times. *Should I trust or not?*

I know well the battle that rages not fifteen yards from me as the latest stray dog tries to decide whether I'm safe or not. The torment is unbearable. She takes a few halting steps forward, then thinks better and turns her head away as if to break a spell that is about to overcome her. I would love to rush in, scoop her off her feet, and convince her how safe I am for her, but if I so much as lean forward, she scurries even farther into the darkness. Right now, the dog across from me has no idea what awaits her if she can just overcome her fear.

All of the benefits of my house are hers if she comes, and they are considerable. The long list of stray or abandoned puppies that have shown up in our front yard makes me wonder if our address isn't scratched into every fire hydrant because I am the softest touch in town when it comes to a dog without a home.

Here strays receive the royal treatment, complete with a flea bath, loving attention, and plenty of food and water. During the following week I will do everything I can to locate the owner. Failing that, I'll take an ad out in the newspaper promising a free dog to a good home and will let it go only when I am convinced the new family will treat my dog well.

Many warm up to the attention right away, but others act as if they've been beaten by every human they've ever known. Instead of running toward the open gate, the lighted doorway, and all the love they could handle, they shrink back in the shadows, unsure whether it's safe.

The latest dog is one of those. I hold out my hand, offering her food. I know she hasn't eaten in a while because I can count every rib right through her fur. I coax lovingly, speaking in soft tones, trying to caress her with my words. This won't be easy. I will not force her into my home and allow her fears to be a risk to my children and my dogs. If she comes, she will have to come willingly.

The game will go on for a while, and right now it could go either way. Will I take care of her and help her, or will I be like all the others who have hurt or abandoned her? She doesn't want any more pain, preferring to leave now if my invitation will only add more grief.

I know exactly how she feels. Every time I play this game, I can't help but think how much this mirrors God the Father reaching out to me, and the difficult time I have learning to trust Him. The choice to trust is never easy –

not for stray dogs, nor for stray sons and daughters of God.

What incredibly important roles fathers play in their families, and what incredible influence fathers have on their children. Of all the different ways a father can influence his children, the most awesome, the most responsible, and if you think about it, the most overwhelming influence is how much a father influences his children's understanding of God the Father.

In spiritual direction, it happens more often than not, that the person providing spiritual direction for someone will ask them to describe their relationship with their own father. And more often than not, there is a direct correlation between a person's image and understanding of God and that person's relationship with their father. Many times, a healthy relationship with their Dad paves the way for a healthy image and understanding of God. And that is an awesome responsibility.

How blessed I am to have a Dad who, like Our Blessed Lord in today's Gospel, is steady in the storm. I've preached about the tragedy my family had in 2001 when we lost my three year old nephew in a car accident. And while my Dad did not have the ability to quiet the storm of burying a son,

grandson and nephew, my Dad's steady, but simple advice that "We will get through this," shown not only in word, but by example resounds in me every time adversity comes my way.

And for every time I heard my Mother say growing up, "Oh yeah? Go tell your father what you did!" and for every time I heard my father say growing up, "Whatever you do, don't tell your mother!" - there was never a time I didn't trust my Dad.

Jesus reveals God to us as Father. In a particular way, he reveals God to us by the word "Abba," which many, myself included translate as "Daddy." But Daddy falls short. Abba is a term of endearment, of extraordinary intimacy that is a lot more complex than Daddy. Abba has with it tenderness, familiarity, but as much as anything, it has with that stability, dependability, reliability and faithfulness.

Whether or not you are blessed in the same ways I am to have a Dad like mine, learning to trust God is one of the most difficult things any one of us will ever learn to do. And if I can understand that for a stray dog, how much more does God the Father understand that for us in the midst of:

- ✓ the storms of life,
- ✓ the winds of unpredictability,
- ✓ setback,

- ✓ crisis,
- ✓ tragedy,
- ✓ or just the plain daily grind

that can be so overwhelming. Help us, God our Father, to trust you: to be the voice that steers through every situation, the peace that settles troubled hearts, the One who is steady in the storm. It's a hard lesson to learn but the older you get, the easier it becomes.