

Fr. John Sassani
Homily Given on July 19, 2009
Sixteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
Liturgical Year B

I visited the Holy Land in 1998. It was an extraordinary experience! We went for two weeks, so it was at a fairly relaxed pace that gave us time to linger in places. We visited all the expected places: Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and the Jordan River, and everything in between. One thing I did not expect was on the Sea of Galilee, a boat known both as the Galilee Boat and the Jesus Boat.

In 1986, the level of the Sea of Galilee was particularly low. Two fishermen discovered an ancient boat buried in the mud. It was excavated over 12 days and dated to be from the first century after Christ. There is no reason to believe Christ used it, but it gives us a real sense of the boats used in His time. The boat is 25 feet long, 7 feet wide and 3 feet high. In today's Gospel, with 13 people in the boat and the square sail, it's not very spacious.

Let's imagine this story. There is Jesus and the twelve apostles. The twelve are just back from their first solo preaching mission. Traveling two by two, the six teams have gone all over Galilee. It's hard to know what the pairings were. I'm fairly certain that Matthew and Simon the Canaanite didn't go out as a team. In some ways, they must have been enemies. Simon was working to overthrow the Roman occupation of Israel. Matthew worked for the Romans as a tax collector. However, back together with Jesus, in a small boat, there were all the makings of a combustible conversation. None of the Gospel writers speak to their struggle, but there must have been some, at least at first.

Back to the boat. It sounds like a calm day. The twelve are tired – ready to rest and relax for a time in the boat. The crowd is left behind on the other side. Listen to the conversation. Perhaps there is some tension, especially between Matthew and Simon. Imagine the scenery...the water...the calm...the quiet. They are enjoying the peace, a peace not generated just by the scenery and the water but by Christ. Imagine how He directs the conversation. Consider the impact His peaceful presence has on them.

This is what St. Paul is describing in the letter to the Ephesians: "In Christ Jesus, you who were once far off have become near." Paul is not speaking about two individuals but about Gentiles and Jews becoming one in Christ Who is establishing peace. And this peace is not limited to them, nor just to us. It extends to all of the Kingdom of God.

Christ is calling us to rest with Him and with one another. We do this in our worship – personal prayer – our ARISE groups – in service – deeds of neighborly love. But we also have personal estrangements, divorces, ideological tensions – just like Matthew and Simon. Christ wants to help us with all these divorces, tensions, irreconcilable differences, to show His peacemaking power.

Who are the people, what are the situations that separate us? Let's ask Christ to help us to receive His peace in order to become peacemakers in His Name.