

May 3, 2020

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; 1 Peter 2:20b-25; Jn 10:1-10

We wish that we did not have to go through the many difficult times we go through, but many things on the path of life are out of our control (like a pandemic shutdown) - this is not something that we can opt out of, and certainly not something that we can escape. But our readings today tell us that Jesus is actually above all the things, and that he is there to show us a way out. But if there is no escape from the hardships of life, how can Jesus show us a way out? The answer comes in how we respond to these things, and in how tightly we hold to Jesus.

So let me tell you a story: There were these three men stranded on an island after a shipwreck. They had nothing to eat for six months except coconuts and some fish that they could catch. They were hungry, they were tired, they were uncomfortable for having slept outside all this time. One day they see a boat off shore and go running out to call to it. The owner of the boat tells them that he is going back to the mainland in two days when he expects he'll get his quota of fish. They can come with him, and when they're back they can stay stay at his villa with servant, all the wonderful food they can eat, soft beds, and all the comforts. They looked at the man and he was kind of shabby looking - they asked, "you have a place like that." He said, "yes I know I don't look like much but I am very wealthy. I own this fishing company and like to roll up my sleeves from time to time with the others." They were skeptical. One man asked, "well what do you have to eat on this boat right now"? He said, "I'm running low, I've got some potatoes and dried fish, and we'll all have to ration it for it to last till we get back." One man said, "I'd have more food if I stayed here"! Another said, "You want us to stay on a boat in the open ocean for two days? Are you nuts"? The other didn't say much but looked a bit disappointed. In the end two of the men decided to get in the boat. They waved to their friend who decided he was going to stay on the island till a better offer came along.

On the way back, although the boat owner always encouraged the others, shared the work and his food with them, one of the men complained constantly about how poor the food was, about how the boat was too small, about how it was unfair that he was being expected to do work after all he had been through. The other was more quiet - he kept thinking about the villa that they were heading to, he reasoned that if he helped on the boat with the fishing that the quota would be filled faster and they would get back sooner. He had his little bits of food to maintain strength and remembered how bad it had been the first nights on the island before they figured how to catch fish. They both made it to shore. The difference was that one man had a terrible and stress-filled trip, the other was relaxed and trusting in the owner, and the trip didn't seem too long. Their friend in the island never did get another boat - and was never heard from again.

Jesus is like that boat owner. He knows how to ultimately get over the problems in life. Look at what we have just recently celebrated. In the first reading we heard Peter tell the crowds: *God has made both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.* People conspired against

Jesus, they made him suffer, they did the worst possible thing to him in order to get rid of him ... and now he is even more powerful than he was before. We hear in the Gospel that he is for us both shepherd and the gate. He is the shepherd who leads us to the promises God made through all of time - just like the boat owner was leading the men to the promises he made - and Jesus provides for us - like the owner shared his food with them. Jesus calls us to follow trustingly, like sheep follow when the shepherd calls. As Jesus says of the shepherd: *he walks ahead of [the sheep], and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice.* In our story two of the men followed - the third was waiting for a different voice, one that would tell him more what he wanted to hear. But as Peter reminds us, there is only one Jesus, one Lord, one voice - and when asked what to do to be saved he says we must *Repent and be baptized* - Not make a faith acclamation or do certain things only - but to enter into an intimate union through the body of Jesus who is the gate.

When Baptized we are joined to the body of Jesus and enter the fold. But that is not the end of the story. Just like the men in the boat had to work and participate in a communal effort, just like the sheep have to go out each day to graze and are not hand fed - we must cooperate and work alongside Jesus in this life. We can follow Jesus' example like the men on the boat followed the example of the boat owner who ate the same food with them and did the same work. When we suffer we must know that Jesus did too, and that, as we heard - it was not an end, but a cause for an amazing transformation. Our Second reading says: *When he was insulted, he returned no insult; when he suffered, he did not threaten; instead, he handed himself over to the one who judges justly.* Like the men in the boat trusted and handed themselves over to the boat owner, like Jesus trusted and handed himself over to the Father, so we must trust in his promises and hand ourselves into the care of the shepherd who seeks to lead us to a wonderful place.

Despite what it looked like to the men as they got in the boat, despite the hard two days on the ocean, the shabby looking boat owner was more than they gave him credit for, he did actually own a beautiful villa, and they were taken care of. Despite what it looks like now in this world, despite whether it seems Jesus has a place prepared for us - he does, and he will care for us. The only one who really missed out in our story was the one who never got on the boat, and the one that had the worst trip of all was the one who always wanted what he couldn't have, had no patience, and was frustrated, upset, and ungrateful. However, one of the three got in the boat, worked without complaint as a member of the crew, was content with what he had - knowing it could be worse. He knew that the journey was only temporary and he focused on what was at the end of the journey. He was able to work joyfully, he was able to eat contented, and for him ... the hard journey didn't seem so long. It was his attitude towards his situation he was in, his assurance that something lay beyond that hard journey, and his faith in the boat owner who led and encouraged him, that made the difference. Jesus assured the sheep who follow his voice that he will be with them in this life. Listen to him so you can be at peace, grateful, productive, and satisfied in this life while he leads to something great and wonderful.