

From the Homily Library of Fr. Callistus Iyorembor

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year A - August 9, 2020

Courage! Do Not Be Afraid

The setting for our Gospel passage this week is the Sea of Galilee. I have had a very remarkable experience on the Sea of Galilee that I would like to share with you today. October last year I had the privilege of leading a pilgrimage - 29 people to the Holy Land. At nights we noticed there were strong winds that blew from the Sea right across to the building where we were staying.

As part of our pilgrimage experience we had opportunities to sail in a boat across the Sea of Galilee. Something extraordinary happened when we got to the middle of the Sea. The Sailor turned off the engine of the boat for about 7 - 10 minutes. Before we boarded, we were told this would be part of the pilgrimage experience; so, we did not panic. We sat down, read scripture, prayed and enjoyed the serenity on the sea. It was during this time that we felt again this strong wind that tossed our boat a little bit.

When all of this was happening, we were told to be quiet, as silence was going to help us reflect on this spiritual experience and understand today's Gospel episode better. We learned that it was common that storms would blow across the sea all the time because of the way in which the water was situated.

Jesus Calms Our Fear and Brings Us Peace

This setting for today's Gospel on the Sea of Galilee is meant to be understood symbolically. Whenever we find Jesus in a boat with his disciples, what we have is a powerful image of the Church; all of us followers of Jesus making our way through the stormy waters of history. The boat represents the church; the wind and the waves stand for the trials and tribulations, challenges and persecutions that all of us face daily in our desire to follow Jesus.

Notice that 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. (He came towards them walking on the sea). He calms their fear and brings them peace. Friends, this is our message for today; Jesus is always with us no matter what we might be going through. No matter what storms we are experiencing, He is with us even until the end of time.

The Example of The Prophet Elijah

Sometimes, people think that if you have enough faith, then life will be smooth sailing for you. But this is not always the case. Faith doesn't shield us from the hard knocks of life and death. We see this in the first reading today, which is an account of the great Prophet Elijah who was undoubtedly a man of faith, but because he was opposed to the worship of idols, Queen Jezebel wanted to kill him. Elijah 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 voice of the Lord in a tiny whispering sound. He was strengthened by that experience and was able to go on. God was with Elijah and will continue to be with us.

Peter's Faith

The example of Peter in today's Gospel is especially enlightening. This story of Peter sinking and being saved by Jesus is a strange one. Initially, Peter is full of faith as he sets out across the water. We remember his brave words at the Last Supper: "Lord I am ready to die with you if necessary." But then comes doubt and cowardice, and he begins to sink so that Jesus has to rescue him. Peter represents all of us often caught between faith and doubt. It is comforting for us to see that at times even the apostles and early Christians were weak and fearful. In other words, these early disciples were just like us in the present moment! 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 must learn to seek the Lord's help. It is

precisely during our weak moments that we experience the strength of God. If we never felt ourselves going under, then we would never know the rescuing power of God.

Faith does not save us from storms, trials and tribulations. Faith gives us strength to face our greatest fears. The person who has faith has a source of strength and inspiration, especially when trouble strikes. **It is not we who keep the faith. It is the faith that keeps us.** Today's Gospel story shows us the power of faith. When the wind is contrary and we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storms of life, **Jesus calms the troubling storms.** 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.

Prayer of Faith

Lord, like Peter, we too have often set out confidently across the waters of life. As soon as the winds of trouble rise against us and the waves of adversity begin to overwhelm us, we lose our nerve and begin to sink. Jesus, when our faith falters as it often does, may we hear your gentle voice saying to us *"Courage! Do NOT be afraid."* In that moment, Lord Jesus, may your divine power uphold us, calm our fear, steady our nerves, and enable us to steer our little boat to a place of safety and peace, beyond the wind and the waves. In Jesus' name we pray! Amen.

New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies by Flor McCarthy, SDB was very helpful.