

**August 9, 2020 The Strong Hands of Jesus Homily:** When I was a child of five or six, my mother, a disciplinarian, told me never to cross to the other side of the street alone. “It’s too dangerous”, she said. “Your safety would be at risk.” She had in mind New Scotland Avenue, a busy roadway in my old neighborhood. As a child, I found this major artery in Albany to be somewhat intimidating. The heavy traffic made it even more so. My mother insisted that an adult take me by the hand and accompany me to the other side of the street. Very often it was left to my maternal grandmother to hold my hand tightly and lead me. I recall with gratitude that I felt safe and secure.

In today’s gospel (Mt.14:22-33) Jesus makes his apostles get into the boat and go before him to the other side. It turned out to be a consequential journey. While Jesus is at prayer, his disciples are in great distress. Their boat, a symbol of the Church, is tossed about by the stiff wind and the punishing waves. It is in the darkness of the night that they must reach the other shore. The disciples are understandably paralyzed by fear. What made matters even worse is that Jesus is not physically with them.

As dawn approaches in the fourth watch of the night (3 a.m. to 6 a.m.), Jesus comes toward them walking on the sea. The disciples are terrified. The always impulsive Peter asks Jesus to command him to leave the boat and approach him. Jesus complied. Peter gets out of the boat and begins to walk on water. The moment he takes his eyes off Jesus, he falters and begins to sink. Earlier in the gospel, Jesus stretched out his hand and healed a leper. In this incident, he stretches out his hand, helps Peter up, and rebukes him with the words, “O you of little faith.” The strong hands of a carpenter’s son reached down into the water to save a fisherman, who is drowning.

Saint Augustine, imagining that he is addressing the disciple Peter, commented, “Peter, the Lord leaned down and took you by the hand. With your strength alone, you cannot rise. Hold tight to the One who reaches down to you.”

The saint’s words are addressed to us as well!

Perhaps you may recall a song recorded around the year 1970 by the Canadian recording artist, Anne Murray, which reached number two on the Billboard charts. It is a song of faith: “Put Your Hands in The Man”. The words were likely inspired by today’s gospel. “Put your hands in the man who stilled the water. Put your hands in the man who stilled the sea.”

Jesus’ stretching out his hand to Peter to lift him up is a powerful image for his stretching out his hand to lift us up from death and raise us up to eternal life with him.

We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials. We all find ourselves in stormy situations from time to time. Christ is always there with arms outstretched and hands open ready to lift us up. The words of the Psalmist come to mind: “I will rescue him and glorify him. I am with him in time of trouble.” (Psalm 90)

Once Peter is back in the boat, and this time with Jesus, peace and calm are restored.

While awaiting execution in London’s infamous Tower of London Saint Thomas More penned a lovely and noteworthy prayer. Let us contemplate his extraordinary faith in a time of extreme danger. “I will

not mistrust God, though I feel myself weakening and on the verge of being overcome with fear. I trust He shall place His holy hands on me and in the stormy seas hold me up from drowning.”

Even though many of us are adults, and no longer children, we still need a strong hand to accompany us on our journey to the other side of life.

Precious Lord Jesus, take my hand when I am fearful and exposed to great danger. You are the Hand of God.

Amen!