

Homily for June 20, 2021 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Several years ago a remarkable film, a production of the B.B.C., turned up on British television: "God on Trial". It tells the story of Jews awaiting execution in one of the cell blocks of the notorious concentration camp, Auschwitz during the Second World War. In the waning moments of their life, they decide to put God on trial. His alleged crime: a breach of contract with his people. God has broken his covenant.

Witnesses for the defense and prosecution were called upon to give testimony. The prosecution argued that God ignored the cries of his people; that he remained silent as innocent women and children were systematically murdered. "Why", the prosecutor complained, "did God allow this to happen"?

In God's defense, it was argued that no mere mortal knows the mind of God. All one can do is pray and have faith. After all, Jews have been tested time and again in their illustrious history.

At the end of the mock trial, a verdict was reached: guilty.

But when the prisoners were led to the gas chambers, all without exception, prayed the hymns of praise and faith from the Psalms.

In life's darkest moment, they trusted in the God of the covenant.

In today's gospel, the Evangelist Mark gives us an account of Christ's stilling of the storm. Jesus is asleep, his head resting on a cushion. It is the only time that the four gospels describe Jesus being asleep. And that is not without significance. According to the rabbis, an untroubled sleep is a sign of trust in the power and protection of God.

For instance, in the Book of Jonah, the ship in which Jonah had taken passage was slammed by a fierce wind and a mighty storm. Jonah, meanwhile, was in the bowels of the ship, fast asleep.

Contrast the serenity of Jesus with the anxiety of his disciples. They are anxious for their lives. A fear of drowning haunts them. They cried to Jesus, "Don't you care that we are about to drown?" (Mk. 4:38) How can Jesus sleep when their lives are endangered?

God often seems not to be there in the midst of life's storms. We ask, "Has he forgotten me? And "Is he asleep?

For the Church Fathers, the storm tossed boat bearing the disciples and the sleeping Jesus has been used as an image of the Church, battered and beaten by the waves.

Jesus is in the boat. His presence alone should have been enough to allay the fears of his disciples. He reprimanded them "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith? (Mk. 4:40)"

Strong faith in Jesus is the only way to make it through the storms of life with inner peace and courage. We must always trust in God, even amid the most terrible storms.

Saint Augustine, one of the doctors of the Church, has given us a profound reflection on today's gospel. For the great bishop, "the boat in which Jesus Christ is sleeping is your heart in which your faith is slumbering.

The storm is brewing in your heart. Watch out for shipwreck, awaken Jesus Christ.

There is a story of Helen Keller, who, from her earliest days, was blind deaf, and unable to speak. One day, as a child, she climbed a tree. Suddenly, a storm blew up and began to shake the tree violently. Helen said, "Just as I was thinking that the tree and I should fall together my teacher took hold of my hand and helped me down."

In the view of A Jesuit priest, Mark Link, the story illustrates the kind of fear that gripped the disciples during the storm on the Sea of Galilee.

It also helps us to appreciate their joy and peace when Jesus stilled it.

"I sleep, but my heart watches" (Song of Songs 5:2)

Our Lord may seem to be sleeping in regard to us and our concerns, especially when we are deeply troubled, and at the end of or rope.

In fact, he watches carefully over us and for that reason alone we ought to be steadfast in faith and banish all doubts.