

Strength in the Storm

On Sunday, I celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation with 23 students at Holy Spirit Catholic Community in Rock Springs. The homily is below.

We have been battling stormy seas for more than a year. The dark clouds of COVID-19 covered the entire earth and kept battering us. Loved ones have been sick or died. Others were affected economically. Small businesses are struggling to find enough workers. Some families worry if they will lose their livelihood or home. In the tempest, people cried out to the Lord like the disciples who asked Jesus, ***“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”*** (Mt. 4:38).

Then there is the unending political storm in the aftermath of the election, protests, and violent demonstrations. Partisan politics has crept into families and faith communities. For many Christians, political warfare has become their religion, instead of the Gospel of Christ. The outrage and attacks fester through social media. The cacophony of angry voices wears can wear you down. So, we pray, ***“Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?”***

Tragic death is the most brutal storm. Two weeks ago, a 14-year-old tough ranch kid spent the day branding. That night he died with no known cause of death. His parents are devastated. I called his dad who said that he thought he could get through it, but he was not sure about his wife and three children. In tragedy, it is natural to cry out: Why did this happen? What is God doing? ***“Lord, do you not care that we are perishing?”***

No one is protected from storms in life. Having Jesus in the boat did not protect the disciples from a violent tempest. To be a disciple does not mean to never experience a tragedy. However, disciples are able to weather storms differently than non-believers.

Jesus replied to the frightened disciples, ***“Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?”*** (Mk. 4:40). He asks us the same question. In the storms of life, the Lord challenges us to trust. Storms and tragedies are a time to deepen faith. Jesus challenged the disciples to grow in faith as he asked them, ***“Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?”*** Think of how your faith has grown because of feeling overwhelmed in trials and tempests. We see this in the saints.

The student who chose **Gianna Beretta Molla** as her saint wrote: “I chose St. Gianna because when she was pregnant with her 4th child, she found out she had a tumor. The doctors told her she had to get an abortion. After hearing this she refused. A few days after she gave birth, she died. She gave up her life for another. I find that just amazing.”

As a medical doctor, St. Gianna knew the risk of not removing the cancerous tumor. But she was steadfast in her decision. Near the end of her pregnancy, she told a friend, “I’m going to the hospital, but I’m not sure if I’ll ever come home. My pregnancy has been so difficult. I fear they’re going to have to save one or the other; I want my baby to live.” Her friend responded that she had three children who needed her, so she should save her own life. But Gianna had decided that saving her unborn child was God’s will.

Later her husband Pietro said, “She was convinced, as a wife and as a mother, that she was extremely *necessary* to me and to our children. However, she knew that at that very moment she was *indispensable* to the little creature who was growing inside of her.” In other words, Gianna believed in Divine Providence (pp. 67-73, *The Saints in Mercy*).

She believed that God would provide for her husband and children. But her decision was indispensable for the child in her womb. God had put this decision into her hands alone. Without her God could “provide for” the other three children, but God needed her help to “provide for” the child in her womb. For this, she was indispensable.

This is what faith looks like. It means to trust in God's Providence while a storm rages around us, and others are telling us to abandon the ship. It means to go to the cross like Jesus with trust in the Father's love. St. Gianna had a strong prayer life. Her husband described her faith in this way. "In all circumstances, you always called on and entrusted yourself to the will of the Lord. I remember that you always put aside time every day for prayer and meditation, conversation with God, and gratitude for the gift of our wonderful children."

Faith and trust in providence flow from a life of steady prayer. This is seen in your Confirmation saints. St. Carlo Acutis worked his spiritual journey. One student wrote: "I chose Carlo as my saint because he was always helping other people, especially the poor. He spent at least one hour or more praying each day. He also went to Church everyday or read the gospel."

God graciously gives you his Holy Spirit, but you need to do your part. If you work on your relationship with God, then you will be as strong as Jesus. You will say like Carlo, "To be always close to Jesus, that's my life plan." He also wrote: "To me being a Christian is to observe the world and bring my joy, my strength to others."

St. Carlo died of leukemia at age 15. God did not protect him from the storms of life. But the Lord provided the strength he needed. He shined with hope. He was caring for the poor and strong in suffering. He knew that God always provides.

Today God gives you his Spirit to be like your Confirmation Saints. All you need to do is believe in the gift of the Spirit and be open to it. The Holy Spirit will guide you according to God's providence. The Spirit gives you the strength to endure the worst tragedy. The main way to pray is to simply ask God with faith and to be receptive. The more you ask, the more God will give. Ask for great things. Dare to ask God to make you a saint. Ask for the grace to be as strong as Christ and to love like Christ.