

Jesus spends a lot of time in the Gospel of Mark in a boat, on the water, crossing back and forth between one side of the Sea of Galilee and the other. Jesus crosses back and forth between the Jewish shore and the Gentile side. Certainly, in the early decades of the church a lot of attention was paid to helping Jewish people understand Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament and the missionary call to reach out and welcome the Gentiles into the church.

We also know that in Mark's Gospel, Jesus teaches while he is in the boat. Water carried sound well onto land and the geography helped to form a natural amphitheater so that Jesus could speak easily to large crowds.<sup>i</sup> We might also see the boat as a metaphor for the church. Jesus is in the boat. He is present in the church teaching each generation.

Today, the apostles are troubled by the violent storm that nearly breaks their boat apart. Jesus awakens, speaks, and immediately there is a great calm. "They were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?'" (Mk 4:41). Steeped in the creation story from Genesis, the apostles could not help but draw a comparison with the calm that came out of chaos when God spoke at the dawn of creation and their own situation. In the Christian community this calming of the violent storm was also seen through the eyes of faith. It is a sign of Jesus' saving presence amid persecutions that threatened the existence of the early church (Note to Mk 4:41).

Persecutions continue in our own day and age. One of the most troubled areas for Christians in Africa is in the Diocese of Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria, home to Father Alphonsus and Father Aiden. The Islamist extremist group Boko Haram has created a violent storm of persecution to drive Christians away. "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mk 4:38).

Some years ago, Bishop Oliver was praying in a chapel before the Blessed Sacrament when the Lord suddenly appeared to him. "Jesus didn't say anything at first, but extended a sword toward him, and he in turn reached out for it."<sup>ii</sup> The sword turned into a rosary. Through prayer, although it may take years, the storm of persecution will be calmed, and Boko Haram will be expelled.

Perhaps the most violent storm for the world today is the pandemic which has spread to every corner of the globe infecting more than a 100 million souls. Jesus starts today's gospel by making the invitation, "Let us cross to the other side" (4:35). With the Paschal Mystery, Jesus suffered, died, was buried, descended to the dead, and rose again. He broke open the gates of death and invited all marked by the sign of faith to cross to the other side of eternity.

Amidst the pandemic, over 2.2 million people have died. We mourn each loss and pray for an end to the pandemic. But through the eyes of faith, we see Jesus inviting people into the boat to cross over to the other side. And those arriving on the shores of eternity must certainly react as the apostles do in today's gospel. They are filled with awe and wonder.

---

<sup>i</sup> LaVerdiere, Eugene. *The Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*

<sup>ii</sup> [catholicnewsagency.com/news/after-vision-of-christ-nigerian-bishop-says-rosary-will-bring-down-boko-haram-78382](https://catholicnewsagency.com/news/after-vision-of-christ-nigerian-bishop-says-rosary-will-bring-down-boko-haram-78382)