

“Let us cross to the other side” (Mk 4:35). In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus had been sharing the Good News on the Jewish side of the sea. This is his first venture to the other side. He is headed into Gentile territory. Jesus came first to the Jews, but the Gentiles are also part of God’s plan. Jesus came to save everyone. It is a reminder to us. We are called to be missionary disciples. We must reach out beyond our comfort zone and cross over into uncharted territory to bring Christ to others.

Crossing in a tiny boat against the mighty power of the sea was exceedingly difficult. Winds and waves battered the boat and jostled the apostles. Through it all, Jesus was quietly sleeping. “The contrast between the storms violence and Jesus’ peaceful attitude could not be more striking.”¹ The boat is symbolic for the church; the storm is symbolic of difficulties in the church. Jesus rebuked the wind and commanded the sea to be silent. For as worried and concerned as we may be about difficulties in the church, we must always remember Jesus is in the stern of the boat, ready to rise and calm any storm that seems to threaten us.

“Let us cross to the other side.” One of the most difficult storms in life can be the suddenness of death. On Monday, I was contacted by the parish administrator for Saint Francis Xavier in Kotzebue. After a long illness, the father of the family had succumbed to the infirmities of old age. Two days later, his wife, his primary caregiver passed away. Husband and wife pledge to care for one another in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad, in stormy weather and in calm seas. Husband and wife, we pray, are now quite at peace having been called home to cross to the other side. For family members, it is not so easy. Grief, loss, pain, sorrow, anger ... a flood of emotions, a storm at sea.

Let us never forget, God is in charge, “Quiet! Be still!” (Mk 4:39). The winds cease when a storm dies down but the soul does not cease when death comes. We cannot see Jesus reaching out to someone in death, but verses from Scripture offer us hope. Our prayers are like that of the good thief on the cross. In our own way, and most likely with different words, we pray, “Jesus, remember our loved one when he comes into your kingdom.” Jesus replies although we are not privy to the encounter on the other side. “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” (Lk 23:43). We must have faith. Wherever there is chaos, Jesus can bring peace and calm. God can handle any storm in our lives.

“Let us cross to the other side.” On this Father’s Day weekend, I think of my own father who has crossed to the other side. My mind wanders back in time to 1968 when the storms of separation were a great concern for a young boy in the 3rd grade. My father deployed to Vietnam ... having crossed to the other side of the world. As a 1st Sergeant, he was responsible for the safety of two hundred men in a war that was full of chaos, sudden death, and loss. He took time each day to write to his family no matter how tired he was. One month after he had gone, he was sent on temporary duty to the beautiful and peaceful shores of Cam Rahn Bay. And God gave him the mystic words to offer peace and comfort to a worried wife caring for four young boys and dealing with all the storms of life as a single parent. He wrote:

When I climbed the large rocks which stood like great sentinels along the coastline, the gentle breeze that swept across my lips felt like the first breath of spring. My eyes sealed closed momentarily as I pretended that you had sent a kiss via the winds and this was the moment to collect the mystic message. It was my love for you and basking in the warmth of all the affection you radiate that transfigured me to such a blissful state of mind. Why do I love thee? There must be an answer I’m sure for heaven and earth only exist within me when I think of you. Life itself becomes meaningful to me when I can do something to make you happy. I know that it doesn’t take diamond rings to set you aglow __ that a

kind word __ a thoughtful act__ an understanding smile__ a caressing touch can ignite an eternity of warmth within you. For these reasons explain why I love you__ and in loving you I have rekindled a fountain of youth that is ready to pour out oceans of love forever and ever. All my love -- All my life.

The words still carry deep meaning 53 years after they were first written. They remind us that even when death intervenes, the flames of love do not extinguish. When one has crossed to the other side, where peace and calm reign in eternity, the prayers for us in the midst of the storms of life continue. "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" (Mk 4:40).

ⁱ LaVerdiere, Eugene. The Beginning of the Gospel of Mark. Pg. 126.