

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, CYCLE A

1 Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a + Psalm 85 + Romans 9: 1-5 + Matthew 14: 22-33

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: August 9, 2020

Peter is chosen by Jesus as the leader of the apostles and leader of the early Church not because he is perfect but because he loves Jesus with all his heart.

The greatest desire of Peter's heart is to be with the Lord Jesus, wherever Jesus is. Which is why he leaves the boat in the middle of a violent storm to go to Jesus.

Only foolhardy fishermen leave the safety of their boats in a storm. But Peter does, when summoned by the Lord Jesus to come to him. Peter's leaving of the boat to walk on the water toward Jesus symbolizes Peter leaving the life he knows for a new life with Jesus. Peter takes the risk of love by leaving a place of safety and security to go where Jesus is calling him to go.

Why? Because Peter trusts Jesus.

Peter has found that with Jesus he is more alive and life is more meaningful.

But, Peter also struggles to entrust himself fully to Jesus.

He tries to keep his eyes fixed on Jesus but there are so many distractions, so much to fear.

Peter hears an ongoing call from Jesus to grow in trust, often in the form of the question: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

"O you of little faith" is a term of endearment Jesus uses for Peter, not of condemnation. Jesus works with the faith Peter has, with Peter's ability in the moment to surrender himself to Jesus.

For even a little faith calls forth from Jesus compassion & salvation.

Jesus knows Peter so well, that he understands Peter is of two minds, which is literally what the word "doubt" means when Jesus asks Peter why did he doubt.

Peter has one mind whose thoughts tempt him to think he is all alone in the midst of the storms of life.

This "mind" panics in a thousand different directions at the slightest sense of insecurity as fear trumps trust.

Peter's other "better" mind knows that Jesus will always love him and take care of him, and this mindset allows him to entrust his life into Jesus' hands, to keep his eyes fixed on the Lord.

This powerful encounter between Jesus and Peter takes place neither on the shore of eternal stability nor in the shabby boat of human accomplishments.

Rather, this encounter takes place over the uncertain gulf of mutual love, in the midst of a storm.

Love propels Peter out of the boat and a greater love than Peter's beckons him forward into a new life and saves him from death.

The place where Peter encounters Jesus is in the very middle of the storm, in the midst of the howling wind and the crashing waves.

This is where Jesus is.

Many Christians have no problem believing that Jesus is with them during times of peace and prosperity, but struggle to believe that he is with them in the midst of sickness and disaster.

But we need remember that Jesus, Immanuel, God-with-us, promises to be with us always, not just at certain times.

We may pray for God to rescue us when faced with the violent storms of trials and suffering, sickness and disaster.

God will do so, but perhaps not in the way we imagine.

For it is often in times of darkness and pain that we break through to a new intimacy with God, a closer relationship with the Son of God.

And like Peter, when we respond to the invitation to come closer to Jesus, to share more fully in the divine life he offers us, we shall never be left to drown.

It may feel like it at certain stormy times in our life, but the truth is, the hand of the Lord, who is Jesus himself, always is there to save us.

Like Peter, in order to abandon ourselves totally to the Lord Jesus, we must first feel like we are drowning, because in that moment we call out, "Lord, save me" and give ourselves totally over to His power.

Like Jesus Christ on the cross, in order to abandon ourselves totally into the hands of God our Father, we must first feel what appears to be utter abandonment by God.

For the God who Christ on the cross reveals is a God who protects us from nothing, but sustains us in everything.

Even though we are not shielded from anything this world throws at us, the love of the Lord lifts us up and strengthens us to endure any storm.

So, the invitation in the middle of the storm of this virus crisis is to go to Jesus, keep our eyes fixed on him, to realize he is with us in this storm.

We are not to waste our time looking for him in the past of our former “normal” lives, for the Savior of the world is not present in some idealized past but only in the present moment.

He is with us in this present moment of crisis, in the middle of the wind and waves which threaten to swallow up all that we had placed our trust in and hoped for.

He keeps calling out, “*Come. Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid.*”

The invitation of the Lord Jesus at every moment is to let go of the life we are so fearfully holding onto in order to receive the abundant life he longs to share with us.

He stretches out his hand to save us each day, so we might be empowered to reach out and lift up those who are drowning in fear.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi