

12th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)

June 25, 2006 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.

INTRODUCTION

[Flying over the Cascade Mountains story]

The Sea of Galilee is a relatively small body of water, about 14 miles long and three to seven miles wide – certainly not a lake like one of America's Great Lakes. But storms could up suddenly as the winds swept down from the mountains of Lebanon, more over the boats used by the fishermen on the lake were sturdy enough but not built to resist more than the normal waves on a not very big lake. The fishermen did not take unnecessary chances. They were quite skillful in reading the weather signs and were never very far from one shore or another. This particular storm must have been especially strong and to have given no advance warning.

There are few more frightening experiences than to be in a small boat on a large body of water when a sudden squall comes up. The disciples are experienced fishermen but they know how helpless they are in a turbulent sea.

The disciples do not understand how Jesus can be so calm at a time of mortal danger. We know, however, that in his baptism he has been empowered to deal with all kinds of chaotic situations. He has been sent by his heavenly Father to restore creation and to drive back the powers of darkness and chaos that have entered our lives through sin. He touches sick people and their health is restored; he confronts demons and they are banished; he brings peace and harmony where there had been fear and hopelessness.

Obviously it is a story told for a troubled Church – which of course has always been troubled.

In today's Gospel we see the power of the wind and the sea upon a fragile boat. In the boat are the terrified disciples and the sleeping Jesus. To the early Christians the boat was a symbol of the Church, assaulted by the diabolical powers of materialism and paganism, tossed about by a multitude of attackers, seemingly so fragile it will fall apart at any moment. But the ship of the Church is not without its own power, for in it is Christ. He protects the boat from assault. He protects the Church. He protects us.

There is so much turmoil in our lives. We all experience it. Just when we think things have quieted down, more turmoil erupts. You and I wonder, how much more can I really take? Well, we can't take much more, but the thing is, we are not alone. The Lord is with us. He can and will protect us.

In the days of Jesus, the sea was frequently perceived as the dwelling place of the forces of evil. Manifesting control over the sea was a sign of Divine power. In today's gospel, Jesus is presented as one who *acts*. In both of these old testament readings we see God exercising mastery over the winds and the waves. God commands and they obey. This is exactly what we see Jesus doing in the gospel reading. Today's readings, therefore, show God of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New Testament exercising the same kind of power. They exercise the same kind of power because they are the same. Jesus says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the father...I am in the father and the Father is in me." "The Father and I are one." The story of the storm at sea answers the question, "Who is this man?" Jesus is the Son of God.

In our personal lives, we experience wonderful moments of peace and joy and harmony; but we also have to deal frequently with the challenge of our own kinds of chaos, such as physical ailments, mental anxiety and all the many causes of fear and uncertainty. It is amazing how easily a "calm sea" can change into a "raging storm" of doubt, fear and virtual helplessness. We have to be aware of His Presence in our lives. We have to waken ourselves up to his consuming desire to care for us. For really, he is not asleep. We are the ones who are dozing off, not recognizing his power in our lives. After all, as St. Paul says, we are Christians, a new creation who carry about in ourselves the very power of God. We have to trust in him to quell the turmoil. He loves us. No matter what our present fears are, no matter what suffering we endure now, no matter what crisis we fear for the future, he is there to keep us from falling apart. He is there for us. There is nothing beyond his power.

Living in the world is a struggle for the sincere Christian. Raising Christian children in a materialistic society is a strain to our patience. Often we are sure we are coming apart. That's because we are coming apart. The ship is fragile. The wind is strong. But Jesus is on the boat protecting us.

We need to know how we, like the disciples, can call upon Jesus and suddenly find that our stormy sea becomes calm and serene. Jesus tells us that it is a matter of faith: "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have

faith?” We may be tempted to respond that we do indeed have faith for we can say “Amen” to all the statements of the Creed. That is an important kind of faith but it is not as real and personal as the faith that God wants us to have.

The faith that calms storms in our lives is a conviction that the Risen Lord is present in our world more truly than he ever was to the disciples in Israel. This kind of faith is a special gift of God for which we must pray not only when we are in trouble but especially when things are going well. When his heavenly Father said to Jesus in his baptism: “You are my beloved Son,” he was endowing him with the power of divine love that he would then offer to all of us. In effect, this is the kind of loving presence that speaks to us every moment of our lives and which can be expressed in those reassuring words that we need so much to hear: “I am with you always” (Matt 28:20), which means that everything is going to be alright!

The more we know about the world, the more we realize how little we actually understand. The point, however, is much deeper than the recognizing the limits of human reckoning. What the Book of Job underscores is that God speaks to us "out of the storm." During recent years the media have made us aware of the awesome power of storms. Even those not in the path of hurricanes can sense the feeling of helplessness, the desire to flee or hunker down. It touches us on that level because we all face storms: some physical, but others emotional, the turbulence which results when something unleashes anger. Those storms can rage out of control, although they do not last forever. What matters, in the long run, is whether God addresses us out of the storm. God's word humbles Job. He inclines his head in silence.

Storms or no storms, in tempest and in peace, we must live by faith. The greatest test of faith is the confidence of belief in God through the fear brought by the terrors of darkness and the tempests of temptation. Faith is given by God precisely to sustain our weakness by divine power through the difficulties life will bring.

When a person is saved, having become a new creation, that does not mean that old habits, evil thoughts, and lustful looks are forever done away with and everything literally becomes new in the person's life. We know that this is not true. Today's reading does not echo the person's practice but rather his position.

Let us all go forward this week and walk in the new life and new creations so the glory of God may be manifested through us. Today we pray for the faith to trust him to quell the turmoil of our lives.

Reading 1

Jb 38:1, 8-11

The Lord addressed Job out of the storm and said:
Who shut within doors the sea,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling bands?
When I set limits for it
and fastened the bar of its door,
and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stilled!

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31

R. (1b) Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They who sailed the sea in ships,
trading on the deep waters,
These saw the works of the LORD
and his wonders in the abyss.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

His command raised up a storm wind
which tossed its waves on high.
They mounted up to heaven; they sank to the depths;
their hearts melted away in their plight.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They cried to the LORD in their distress;
from their straits he rescued them,
He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze,
and the billows of the sea were stilled.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

They rejoiced that they were calmed,
and he brought them to their desired haven.
Let them give thanks to the LORD for his kindness
and his wondrous deeds to the children of men.

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or:

R. Alleluia.

Reading II

2 Cor 5:14-17

Brothers and sisters:

The love of Christ impels us,
once we have come to the conviction that one died for all;
therefore, all have died.
He indeed died for all,
so that those who live might no longer live for themselves
but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh;
even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh,
yet now we know him so no longer.
So whoever is in Christ is a new creation:
the old things have passed away;
behold, new things have come.

Gospel

Mk 4:35-41

On that day, as evening drew on, Jesus said to his disciples:
“Let us cross to the other side.”
Leaving the crowd, they took Jesus with them in the boat just as he was.
And other boats were with him.
A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat,
so that it was already filling up.
Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion.
They woke him and said to him,
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”
He woke up,
rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Quiet! Be still!”
The wind ceased and there was great calm.
Then he asked them, “Why are you terrified?
Do you not yet have faith?”
They were filled with great awe and said to one another,
“Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?”