

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Today, the Gospel gives us one of the most heartrending images of the life: a boat in the middle of the sea facing heavy storms and waves.

Earlier, the disciples had been with Jesus, witnessing the miracle of the multiplication of the five loaves and two fish. They had seen His power and experienced His presence. Yet, only a short time later, they find themselves in a completely different situation: their boat being battered by waves; the wind blowing against them; the boat, adrift far from the shore; and Jesus was not physically with them.

Isn't this, sometimes, the story of our own lives?

The moments when everything seems to be going well, and we feel close to God, we pray; we celebrate; we experience His blessings; and we feel that God is very near to us. Then suddenly, something changes! A problem arises, a relationship becomes difficult, and we experience disappointment, frustration, sickness, loneliness, financial difficulties, uncertainty about the future, or some unexpected suffering. Suddenly, our little boat begins to shake; the waves become stronger; the wind blows against us; and we begin to ask: "Where is God? Why is God allowing this to happen? Why can't I feel His presence?"

The beauty in today's Gospel is that Jesus was not absent during the storm; He was simply not visible to them. The disciples were struggling in the boat, but Jesus was on the mountain praying. Then when the disciples were in their most vulnerable moment, Jesus came toward them walking on the sea, but they could not recognize Him. They saw Jesus, but they thought He was a ghost. Their fear prevented them from recognizing the presence of God.

Isn't that also possible in our spiritual lives? Sometimes God comes toward us in the very situation that frightens us, but because our hearts are filled with fear, anxiety, disappointment, and confusion, we fail to recognize Him. Sometimes, the problem is not



that God is absent; the problem is that our eyes are so preoccupied with the storm that we cannot see the One who is coming toward us.

Then Jesus utters those beautiful words: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” Notice, He did not immediately say: “The storm is over!” He said: “It is I!” first, before He changed the situation. He reminds them, first, of His presence.

Perhaps that is what we need most in the storms of our own life.

We often pray: “Lord, take away this problem.” or “Lord, change this situation.” or “Lord, remove this suffering.” But sometimes, God’s first answer is not to remove the storm. His first answer is: “Take heart. It is I. I am with you. Do not be afraid.”, giving us a clear message to tell us that we are not ever alone.

This connects beautifully with the First Reading from the First Book of Kings. In this account, Elijah is searching for God. There is a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire; but God is not in the wind, nor in the earthquake, or in the fire. Finally, Elijah hears the sound of sheer silence, and there in the silence, he encounters God.

Sometimes, we look for God in dramatic signs, but God is already speaking quietly in our hearts. Sometimes, He comes to us not by removing every difficulty, but by giving us the strength to walk through it. This is illustrated when Peter says: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus simply replies: “Come.” and Peter steps out of the boat. For a moment, Peter does what seems impossible: He walks on the water because his eyes are fixed on Jesus. Then he notices and is distracted by the strong wind. The moment Peter takes his eyes away from Jesus to focus on the storm, he begins to sink!

How often has that happen to us? When our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we are able to face things that we never thought we could face. When we become completely absorbed in our problems, our fears become greater than our faith.

As Peter sinks, he cries out: “Lord, save me!” and immediately, Jesus reaches out His hand and catches him. What a beautiful image of God’s mercy. Peter’s faith was weak, but Jesus’ hand is strong. As Peter sinks, Jesus catches him and does not let go.

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps someone here today may feel that they are sinking. There may be someone facing a storm that nobody else knows about. Maybe someone is carrying a burden silently. Perhaps someone is asking: “Where is God in all of this?”

Today’s Gospel gives us the answer: He is closer than we think. He may be hidden from our eyes, but He is not absent. He is walking toward us in the middle of the storm, and He says to us: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Faith does not mean that we will never experience sorrow, pain, or struggle. Faith means that even in our sorrow, we trust that we do not walk alone.

Finally, when Jesus enters the boat, the wind ceases and the disciples fall down before Him and proclaim: “Truly, you are the Son of God.” Perhaps that is the journey of faith for each of us. We begin by asking: “Where is God?” In the middle of our storms, we hear His voice: “Take heart; it is I.” Then, it is only after encountering Him that we are able to say: “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Dear brothers and sisters: when our lives are battered by waves, when the wind is against us, and when the future is covered with mist and we cannot understand what is happening, do not conclude that God has abandoned us. Perhaps one simply cannot see Him yet. So, in the midst of the storm, don’t only look at the waves: look for Jesus; listen for His voice; and hear Him say: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid!”

Let us open the eyes of our heart. Trust Him and keep walking toward Him, because the storm may be strong, the waves may be high, and the wind may be against us; but Jesus is always greater than the storm.