

19th Sunday
8/13/2023

WEATHERING THE STORM

If there is a Times Square in the Catholic world, it would be the plaza in front of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Thoughtfully and creatively designed by the great sculptor and architect, Bernini, the square has been witness to many historic events. Just being there can be a moving experience. Millions of people from around the world pass through it and it's so often populated, even densely populated. But one of the most moving events happened three years ago in March during the shutdown. On the portico of St. Peter's, before a vast and eerily empty square, during a dark rain, Pope Francis celebrated Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. In his homily he likened the pandemic to being a storm recounting an episode from the gospels.

Have you ever been in a boat, while in a storm? Not just when the water was choppy but a true storm. Have you ever felt what it was like to know that your life could very soon be over as you face a horrible death. That goes beyond fear and becomes terror. Three years ago Pope Francis observed, *The storm exposes our vulnerability...Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars.* He added, *Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck.* The point is, that we weather the storm through faith, faith in Jesus. Faith means believing but faith also means trusting.

Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. Note something, Jesus didn't ask Peter to step out of the boat. Instead, Peter asks Jesus to tell him to get out and Jesus obliged. *Come.* I don't know about you but in the midst of being tossed about by the waves, I would probably ask Jesus something else. Now it's easy to criticize Peter for his lack of faith but his faith got him out of the boat. The others disciples didn't do that. Peter shows us a faith both strong and weak. Peter was walking on the water towards Jesus but fear intervened and with it doubt.

But the dark cloud of fear can hold a silver lining. Fear can be an invitation to trust if only we face and move through it with Christ, not alone. In the Book of

Psalms it says, *When I fear I will trust in you; when cares increase in my heart your consolation calms my soul.* Sometimes all we can do is trust.

The day I was ordained a priest, the bishop said in his homily, *May your trust be greater than your fear* which is another way of saying may your faith be greater than your fear. The problem with Peter wasn't that he was afraid, that's natural, but rather that he didn't trust enough, his faith was weak.

Have you ever met people who have walked on water? St. Paul says that we walk by faith and not by sight and so in a broad sense, to walk by faith is to walk on water. Parents who are told that their unborn child may have disabilities and that they "have options" and choose to give birth, walk on water. People who practice their faith amidst difficulties and even persecution, who take their lives into their hands simply by attending Sunday Mass as we do now, walk on water. The list goes on and you can certainly add to it but when we step out in faith, we begin to walk on water.

What's the boat that Jesus is calling you to get out of right now? How is Jesus asking you to step out in faith? At times in big ways but certainly in every little way, we're called to step out in faith, to live lives of intentional faith. Peter may have had a faith that wavered under pressure but he also had intentional faith. His crying out to Jesus was itself, an act of faith.

The gospel today begins and ends with prayer. Jesus spends time in prayer and back in the boat the disciples pray. They worship him. Both as individuals and as members of the Body of Christ together, may we persevere in prayer, particularly through our celebration of the greatest prayer we have, the Eucharist. May our faith and trust be stronger than our fear, even in the midst of storms.

Like Peter we can step out in faith and like Peter we can stumble and even fall but like Peter may we hold tight to the hand that reaches down to us. *Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them.*