

## Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

*June 23, 2024*

The central theme of today's readings is the role of God in calming the storms of life both in the history of the Church and in the lives of us Christians.

In the first reading, God addresses Job for the first time, questioning his right to challenge God's authority and leading Job deeper and deeper into the mystery of creation. We hear how the Lord speaks to Job whose life was devastated by storms of total loss of his possessions, the deaths of his dear ones, and a whole-body disease that left him a miserable person. "Out of the storm," God reminds Job that He is in control.

St. Paul, who "rode out the storm" of rejection by his former friends, also experienced storms of violent hostility from the Jews, his brothers and sisters in God's Chosen People, who refused to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. So, he explains in the second reading that Jesus died for us to make us a "new creation." In order to receive this gift of love, we have to respond by living for Jesus in all situations of our lives because Jesus has gone before us through the uncharted sea of life.

In our Gospel passage, St. Mark assures first-century believers that nothing can harm the Church as long as the risen Lord is with them. The story reminds us that Jesus, resting in our life's boat, is always ready to help us in the storms of life, when we ask.

A woman's job is on the line, and she hopes she won't get fired.

A couple's child is sick, and they want nothing more than for their child to get better.

One spouse wants a divorce, and the other wants them to work it out.

A guy's brother has been carrying a grudge for years, and he hopes it won't last forever.

A daughter is in the grip of an addiction, and she and her parents hope she can beat it.

A man faces criminal charges for doing some stupid things, and hopes the judge doesn't give him any jail time.

A woman struggles to pass the bar, and hopes that her time in law school was not a waste.

The truth about life is that lots of things in life don't go our way. We know that. We know that the woman might lose her job, the child's health might deteriorate, the couple might break up, the guy and his brother might never talk again, the girl might fight her addiction for the rest of her life, the man might go to prison, and the woman might never get to practice law. We know that and we may have gone through that before. We know that not everything works out the way we hope it will. We know that our prayers don't automatically bring about the effect we are hoping for. In other words we know that God is not some kind of spiritual Santa Claus.

And the storms remain. That is what they feel like, right? Storms, at least if the matter is serious enough - serious enough to ourselves or those we love. Storms are unsettling. Storms are unpredictable. Storms are dangerous. Storms sometimes come out of nowhere. Storms do damage. And so do many things we have to face in life. They hurt. They cause pain. They bring sorrow. And they stoke our fears. And they always have.

So how do we understand the story we just heard, the well-known Scripture passage in which Jesus calms the storm? It seems so simple. Jesus sees a problem. Jesus sees a dangerous situation. Jesus hears the panic in his friends' voices. And he fixes it - as only God can do. Bam! Problem solved. Looks so simple. Jesus then gets in a little zinger, a little rhetorical question. He asks,

**“Why are you terrified?”**

Of course, anyone in that situation would be terrified. I think that goes without saying. Yet, Jesus seems to be challenging them to consider whose presence they are in. This reminds me of a line in the Methodist Church hymnal # 511 “with Jesus in my vessel, I smile at the storm”. Jesus

may have phrased his words as a question, but what he was really doing was making a statement. In a certain sense, he was saying, "It's me. You are safe. You will ALWAYS be safe when I am with you."

**"The wind ceased and there was a great calm."**

A miracle had happened. But is that true? A miracle? Was there only ONE? I don't think so. When we see Jesus performing many of his miracles there is a temptation to focus on the external, the visible signs of his power, multiplying loaves and fishes, walking on water, etc . . . We hear these stories and are amazed at what Jesus is able to do. Yet, what Jesus is able to "do" is not limited to the "outside" stuff. Rather, the most powerful miracles are often the ones that happen within the person or people he is encountering, within the human heart. The woman at the well. The lady who was bleeding for years. The man born blind. The woman caught in adultery. And many others. In other words, the visible effects of Jesus' power and compassion are signs of what he is capable of doing within you and me and each person open to him, open to his message, his life, his grace.

And so, the seas that day were calmed by Jesus, but the storms he really calmed were within his friends on that boat. They were terrified, and then were filled with awe. They were sure something bad was going to happen, and then were relieved when Jesus protected them. They were not quite sure who Jesus was, but then were given a window into his true identity. And their anxiety stopped. Their doubts diminished. The storms within them began to subside. And they knew they would be okay. Jesus had worked two miracles, one that was incredible and nearly unbelievable, and one that made an incredible and unbelievable difference in those who witnessed the first miracle - changing them in ways that would change absolutely everything. Can it be the same for you and me?

My dear friends, we know well from experience that our problems and struggles and disappointments may or may not ever disappear, may or may not be "fixed" and never return. Probably some will, and certainly

some won't. And we (in faith) continue to place our needs before our loving God, even if we don't understand his plan, or the choices he makes. We simply speak them in faith, and then trust that God's way is always the best way. "Thy will be done," as we always say in the Lord's Prayer. And hopefully, we mean it.

But HOW we experience those struggles does not have to be dependent on whether or not they go away. Those external storms may not be calmed. That's just the way it is. But the internal storms, the pain within us, the crosses we bear can ALWAYS be calmed by our incredible God. "Quiet! Be still!" weren't words meant only for the waves. They were for his friends too. And they are meant for us as well. So, let's let our loving God calm the unrest, the worries, the pain, the storms in the lives of each of us.

It's only then that the storms all around us might not seem quite as dangerous.