

Fr. Jins' Homily for the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 13, 2023
Matthew 14:22-33

The readings for this week speak of God's saving presence for His people and the need for trusting faith in a loving and providing God who always keeps us company. The first reading tells us of how Elijah the prophet, who had defeated the 450 false priests of Baal with the help of just such a trusting faith in the power of Yahweh (then had to flee for his life), encountered the Lord God on Horeb. In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 85), the Psalmist assures us, "Near indeed is His Salvation to those who fear Him, glory dwelling in our land." In the second reading, Paul laments and mourns over the Jews who, having lost their Faith in Yahweh and His prophets, had rejected their promised Messiah, Jesus. The Gospel episode explains how Peter lost his trusting Faith in Jesus for a few seconds, failed his attempt to walk on water, but was rescued when he called on Jesus for help.

We need to call Jesus in the storms facing the Church and our lives. Let us approach Jesus with strong Faith in his ability and willing availability to calm the storms in the life of the Church and in our lives. Church history shows us how Jesus saved his Church from the storms of persecution in the first three centuries, from the storms of heresies in the 5th and 6th centuries, from the storms of moral degradation and the Protestant reformation movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from the storms of sex abuse scandals of the clergy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is the presence of Jesus which gives us peace even in the wildest storms of life: the storms of anxiety and worries about the future we are suffering now in the ongoing Covid pandemic, storms of sorrow, storms of doubt, tension and uncertainty, storms of anxiety and worries, storms of anger and despair, storms of temptations. Storms reveal to us our inability to save ourselves and point us to the infinite ability and eagerness of God to save us. When Jesus shows up in our life's storms, we find that we gain strength to do the seemingly impossible. For example, when Jesus shows up, he makes marriages out of mistakes, he invigorates, restores, and empowers us to reach the unreachable, to cross the un-crossable. Storms let us know that without him we can do nothing, without him we are doomed to fail. Yet, when Jesus shows up, we gain the strength to join Paul, saying, "In Christ I can do all things." But this demands a personal relationship with God, with Jesus, enhanced through prayer, meditative study of Scripture and an active Sacramental life. Experiencing Jesus' presence in our lives, let us confess our Faith in him and call out for his help and protection always.

We need to imitate the short prayer of sinking Peter: we are expected to pray to God every day with trusting Faith for the strengthening of our personal relationship with Him and for the courage and humility to acknowledge our complete dependence on Him for everything. But when we have no time or mental energy for formal prayers, let us use the short prayers in the Gospels, like Peter's prayer: "Lord, save me!" or the prayer of the mother of the possessed girl: "Lord, help me!" or the blind man's prayer: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" or the sinner's prayer: "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!" We get plenty of time during our travels to say the short prayers like the "Our Father", "Hail Mary" and "Glory be...." We may begin every day offering all our day's activities to God and asking for His grace to do His will and we may conclude every day before we go to sleep, by asking God's pardon and forgiveness for our sins. Keeping a Bible on our table will encourage us to read at least a few words of the Bible and thus listen to what God is saying to us.

We should not limit God's saving presence. There are those who would limit God's presence for their own comfort or security or to keep themselves in power. In years past there were those who would deny God's presence in slaves. There have been those who would ignore God's presence in their enemies. There are those who would refuse to believe that God is present in the murderer sitting on death row, in those who are marginalized by our society: the gay person, the addict, the person living with AIDS, the illegal alien, the handicapped. It is in situations like these that we have to get out of the boat, surprise others, and show them the reflection of God in such people. Let us always look for ways to be surprised by our God and opportunities to wake one another up to the beauty, the power and the nearness of our loving, providing and protecting God. Let us also pray for a deepening of God's gift of Faith within us, that we may be able to recognize Him in the ordinary situations of our lives, and humbly pray to Him saying, "Lord, let us see Your kindness, and grant us Your salvation."