

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A -Mt 14, 22-33
Ferntree Gully News Letter

In the middle of a dark winter's night in a small Midwest farming community, the two-story home of a young family caught fire. Quickly, parents and children followed their well-practiced emergency plan and made their way through the smoke-filled home out into the front yard. There the father quickly counted heads and realized that their 5-year-old son was not among them. Suddenly he heard a wail and looked up to see the boy at his bedroom window, crying and rubbing his eyes. Knowing the danger of re-entering the house to rescue his son, the father called, "Jump, Son! I'll catch you!" Between sobs, the boy responded to the voice he knew so well. "But I can't see you, Daddy!" The father answered with great assurance. "No, Son, you can't see me, but I can see you! Jump!" At that, the boy jumped into the smoky darkness and found himself safely cradled in his father's arms. Our Scripture readings are about trusting – about having Faith – about being able to discern the fact that our God is always with us, even in storms of life.

On this nineteenth Sunday of ordinary time, the Church joyfully reminds us that Jesus our Savior is always close to us. He calms the storms of our life. He lifts us from the depths, and restores our peace. The presence of the storm and all that it represents definitely make us confused, and afraid in life. Thus, it equally deprives us of our peace.

There is something interesting about today's readings. This is simply the fact that, all the three great figures and personalities (Elijah, Paul, and Peter) we encountered in today's readings were in one way or the other embattled. As such, their peace was threatened.

First, Elijah was fearful, and running away from Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel, who wanted him dead at all cost. Second, Paul was ravaged by sorrow and anguish due to the unbelief of his "*fellow brothers of Israel.*" This was a great burden that threatened his peace of mind. Third, Peter was sinking right in front of Jesus, due to fear, his lack of faith and courage. This is the dilemma of our lives, especially during this Covid19 time. In one way or the other, our peace is threatened.

In the first reading, the embattled prophet Elijah encountered God, and his peace was restored. A very significant lesson for us in this reading is that, when we are internally calm and away from the distractions of life, we hear God speak to us.

To say that God spoke to Elijah after the gentle breeze, is simply to say that Elijah experienced peace of mind.

God came at the appropriate time, not in the mighty wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but after a gentle breeze. So, contrary to what some of us think, God speaks to us when we are internally recollected and calm. Often times, we seek God with distracted minds. In such a state, we may not encounter Him. It is when we are recollected, that we hear him speak to us.

In the second reading, Paul expresses his grief for his people (fellow Jews). This was because, they rejected the good news. His sadness and grief were so great that he lamented: *"I will willingly be condemned, if it could help my brothers."* In order words, he was not at peace because of their situation.

Therefore, Paul teaches us that we must not always think about ourselves alone. Rather, we should equally be concerned about the welfare, salvation and peace of others. It is through this, that we derive our own inner peace. When others are not saved, our peace is guaranteed.

In today's gospel, the disciples of Jesus experienced the storm of their life, and Jesus was available to calm it, and equally, restore their peace. "Storms" are part and parcel of our human existence. They are inevitable in this world, just as the waves are inevitable in the sea, and death is inevitable to us.

Sometimes, they hit us so hard that we are crushed, devastated, and almost annihilated. Like the disciples of Jesus, each one of us experiences the storm in diverse ways in our lives and now we are on that kind of experience. That is, the storm that robs us of our peace. However, when they encounter Christ, our peace is restored and they disappear. Hence, Paul wrote: *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies (2 Cor 4: 8-9).*

Finally, as Christ said to Peter, so he also says to us today: *"Courage! Do not be afraid, it is I."* So, all we need to do is to trust Him, and keep walking without the fear of sinking. Like Peter, we must step out with faith and courage against the storms of our life particularly during this Covid19 time.

We are expected to pray to God every day with trusting faith for strengthening our personal relationship with Him and for acknowledging our dependence on Him. 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 to.” We may begin every day offering all our day’s activities to God and asking for His grace to do His will and 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. Therefore, let us hold on firmly to Jesus, who calms our storms and restores our peace. God bless you all.

JOKES

In one of his books, Mark Twain recalls a visit to the Holy Land and a stay in Capernaum. It was a moonlit night, so he decided to take his wife on a romantic boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Twain asked a man in a rowboat how much he would charge to take them out on the water. The man saw Twain’s white suit, white shoes and white hat and supposed he was a rich Texan. So, he said the cost would be twenty-five dollars. Twain walked away as he said, “Now I know why Jesus walked on water.”

“Have Faith my child”: For the umpteenth time Mrs. Youngston came to her pastor to tell him, “I’m so scared! Joe says he’s going to kill me if I continue to come to your Church.” “Yes, yes, my child,” replied the pastor, more than a little tired of hearing this over and over. “I will continue to pray for you, Mrs. Youngston. Have Faith – the Lord will watch over you.” “Oh yes, He has kept me safe thus far, only.....” “Only what, my child?” “Well, now Joe says if I keep coming to your church, he’s going to kill YOU!” “Well, now,” said the pastor, “Perhaps it’s time for you to check out that little parish on the other side of town.”