

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(1 Kings 19:9,11-13 / Matthew 14:22-33)
10.08.2014

There are times when we find ourselves as disciples did on that treacherous night of which today's gospel passage speaks to us.

We find ourselves caught up in the rough and tumble of life.

It feels as if we are battling with a raging storm and contrary headwinds and it is night.

At these times it happens that we panic; fear overcomes us.

We can have the impression that we are *going under*, sinking.

We wonder if we will ever survive what is assailing us on the wave-tossed sea of life.

At such moments, Christ does not fail us. He is aware of what we are going through.

Just as Jesus became aware in His prayer, at a distance, on the mountain-top, that the disciples needed His presence on the lake and drew near to them, so Christ is conscious of our plight in our times of distress.

Do we not sometimes find ourselves surprised on occasion at how the Lord puts it into the hearts of others (often in their prayer times) to draw alongside us to offer us help and encouragement?

Time and again, we experience something of what the apostle Paul tells us he experienced when he wrote to the Corinthians: *God who encourages all those who are distressed, encouraged us through the arrival of Titus* (through a person who came along).

Yes, the Lord Jesus draws near to us and He manifests His care and attention to us, precisely at those times when we need it most.

Frequently, He offers us His help through a person who shows us something of His loving concern for us.

It happens that the Lord puts it into the hearts of people in their prayer times to draw alongside brothers and sisters who are distressed, discouraged and even tempted to despair.

He sometimes puts it into *our* hearts, in our prayer times, to reach out to others in their need ... if only we are attentive to the promptings of His Holy Spirit of compassion.

In the storm-tossed moments of our lives Christ does not fail us.

The Lord comes to us across the troubled waters.

He comes to us in those moments of turmoil we are all led to traverse in life, even though we may be left wondering: *Where is He?*

Does it not happen that we cry out: *Where is the Lord now that I need Him?*

It is not that the Lord is not there.

It is not that He refuses to manifest Himself.

It is not that He does not see our plight.

It is that we do not see that the Lord is with us!

So often we fail to recognise the Lord's presence by our side, and, even before that, deep down within our own hearts.

How come we are unaware of the Lord's presence?

Well, quite often, the problem is that we are elsewhere than where we should be.

We are not properly with/within ourselves.

What do I mean by being *properly with ourselves*?

To be *properly with ourselves* means that we leave room for the Lord to be there with us. It means that we hold in our hearts an awareness of Christ's presence which is, as He has promised, ever assured: *I am with you always*.

The Lord is always with us!

The problem is that sometimes we become just so self-absorbed that we leave no room for the Lord in our lives. Perhaps, without realising what we are doing, we squeeze Him out. This can be especially true when we are suffering: at the very time we need the Lord's presence most.

Our suffering and our pain can become the centre of our attention. Suffering and pain have that effect upon us. In moments of distress we are inclined to become self-centred. We get caught up and lost in, carried away by, our lament: *Woe is me!*

When we read today's gospel passage we remark that it was when Peter took his eyes off Jesus, when he lost sight of Christ that he began to sink. It was when Peter focused on himself alone and became engrossed by the difficulties he was experiencing that he started to go under.

Often we overlook or forget the simplest teachings of the Sacred Scriptures. We miss the very evident points being made, such as that very simple point I have just drawn to your attention.

Just as it was with Peter, so too it is with ourselves at times.

Frequently, without even realising it, we take our eyes off Jesus. We get caught up in and submerged by the difficulties surrounding us and we start to *go under*, we sombre into depression or whatever.

The storms in our lives may be such things as a troublesome work situation, difficulties with colleagues or business associates.

Or again, the storms of our lives may be struggles we are going through in the domain of relationships with significant others: our spouse, a parent, a child, a sibling, a friend, the love of our life.

Or again the storms of our lives could be the hurts caused to us by another's inattention, neglect, forgetfulness, their taking us for granted.

Anger can be raging within us too. (I include there, anger with ourselves as much as that we feel in regard to others.)

Maybe the storm is whipped up by the annoyance awoken in our hearts due to an unfair situation in which we find ourselves, an injustice done to us.

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The list could go on.

In all these situations we can give into the temptation to put ourselves at the centre and forget to focus on Christ.

The basic lesson of today's gospel passage, once explained to me in these terms when I was a child, stands forever: *Keep your eyes upon the Lord and you won't go under!*

I am pretty sure that we have all heard that said, in some shape or form, at one time or another (most probably we have heard it said frequently) and yet we have, just as readily, forgotten it.

Most of us (myself included) fail to remember the basic lesson of today's gospel on occasion. When we fail to remember it we find ourselves sinking.

When we find ourselves in situations where we are frustrated, discouraged, angry we need to focus our eyes upon Christ once again.

Often we will be troubled by things in life. That is just how it is in this broken world. Maybe what troubles us will be what others have done to us, but sometimes, even more than what others have done to us, we will feel with an acute pain around their neglect, what they have failed to do or be at those times when we longed for their proximity, help and support. When this is so, we need to look to Jesus and recognise how He was/is always there for us even if and when nobody else was.

We need to focus on Christ!

When people's word to us has not been honoured, we must turn to the Word of God, the person of Jesus Christ!

Just think of some of the ways in which we go wrong: the ways whereby we miss out on the Lord coming to us, drawing alongside us, reaching out to us.

Does it not happen, for example, that we are so much *on the look out* for someone we have counted upon to draw alongside us that we fail to recognise and miss out on the Lord Jesus who comes to us under another guise, through another person (sometimes many people) whom He sends our way?

To be overshadowed by adversity and grief can be overwhelming at times. The darkness can be so deep that we just can't see a way through it.

To be blinded in the midst of a storm-tossed sea is to be in a perilous situation.

Employing that word *perilous*, which is one we readily attribute to a storm-tossed sea, I am reminded of a verse from the writings of the apostle Paul. Paul wrote to Timothy of *the perilous times that would come when people would be lovers of their own selves*.

Those perilous times have come. Those perilous times are known to us. We mightn't like to have to admit it, but we frequently give into the temptation to be self-centred, *lovers of our own selves*. When this is so, we place ourselves in peril.

We can be, and often are, just so self-absorbed!

When we become totally self-absorbed, what happens? Does it not happen that we sink into sadness, depression, discouragement and despair?

We must lift up our eyes and re-focus on Christ!

We must pray as Peter did, asking the Lord to bid us to come to Him across the water. We must listen for and give answer to the Lord calling out to us, beckoning us to Himself.

We could say that it was Peter's recognition of the Lord that gave him the assurance he needed to

walk upon the sea, even in the midst of the storm raging around him.

We could say that as Peter walked towards Jesus who beckoned him to come towards Him, the disciple became a reflection of the Master whom he was beholding.

Peter began to experience a supernatural force within himself as he gazed upon Jesus.

He began to reflect Christ's own power to the extent that he too could walk upon the water.

Christ's power and strength were shared with Peter. They were made manifest in him. They upheld and sustained Peter.

Likewise, it is vital for us to keep focused on Jesus.

It is by looking to Christ, gazing upon Him, that we are led to reflect Him.

We begin to reflect the Lord, just like two people who really love each other begin to be seen by others as resembling one another

What today's gospel passage shows us is that being in relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing in our life.

From our relationship with Christ we draw forth the strength we need to buoy us up and see us through the challenges of life.

A line from the Letter to the Hebrews comes to mind at this point: *Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it perfect.*

Faith made perfect. Perfect faith.

This is what we are called to.

It is faith made perfect, perfect faith, that holds us back from sinking when the pressure is on.

It is doubt which submerges us.

In the epistle of James we read: *People who doubt are like waves of the sea. The wind blows and tosses them around.*

That is an interesting word picture!

It draws our attention to the fact that it was Peter's doubt that caused him to be tossed around by the wind and the waves and made him begin to sink.

I would dare to say that at that moment the storm was not just around Peter, it was within him.

Let us be humble and honest enough to admit that this is where most of the storms we traverse in life are rooted: within us!

Let us be humble and honest enough to admit that the turmoil, rage, assaults, fears, all the sources of peril we encounter are, by and large, not external to us, but within our hearts.

It is when we focus too much upon ourselves, when we become self-absorbed and allow our darkness to speak to us that we sink.

In our hours of anguish and distress the call is to connect with Jesus.

Christ's peace, which is to be found in the depth of our being, is gently powerful.

It is more powerful that whatever storms may be tossing us about in life.

Christ's peace, the calm He gives, is stronger than the storms we feel mounting and raging either from without or from within us.