

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(Job 38:1,8-11 / Mark 4:35-41)  
21.06.2015

Just the other day I was talking to a Religious Superior who smiled as he recounted how he had received a visit from an American business lady the previous week. This woman had said to him how easy it was to deal with him because he was evidently established in a profound interior peace. He assured me that this was far from how he was feeling that day. He felt a storm-tossed sea of emotions welling up in his heart. The lady looking at him from outside was totally unaware of what was going on within him. She thought all was calm within him. He left her with her illusion.

This experience shared illustrates for us that it can happen that even those who look calm on the surface may be feeling storm-tossed inside.

I suspect we all feel storm-tossed at times, even though people around us may ignore just what is going on within us. They may even think that we too are permanently established in perfect peace.

Experience shows us that all kinds of emotions can be lurking deep down within our hearts: emotions that leave us feeling as if we are in peril. We may be caught between anger, hurt, fear, irritability etc. The cocktail of all these emotions can leave us feeling very vulnerable and even in danger. Our emotional turmoil can leave us feeling like those travelling in that little boat making its way through very choppy waters on the Lake of Galilee.

When we feel disturbed and filled with anguish, just what might today's gospel have to say to us?

Well, the first thing may be this: it is acceptable for us to feel as we do.

I realise I have used that words *feel* and *feeling* a lot so far. I have done so intentionally, for I believe it really is important for us to feel things in order to pick up on what is going on within us.

To dampen our feelings is an option we may prefer to follow, because it leaves us somewhat less uncomfortable, but, to put a lid on our feelings can be dangerous. This can put us at great risk. It can lead us to breaking point.

The next thing I believe today's gospel passage assures us of is that the Lord is with us. Yes, despite appearance to the contrary, the Lord is present to us. He is always with us. Indeed, He is within us.

Given that the Lord is at hand, the situations in which we find ourselves, however uncomfortable it is for us to be caught up in them, are held in hand.

If the Lord is always within us, it is also true to say that we are always held in His heart.

Everything concerning us is taken into consideration by the Lord.

With this recognition, comes the call to see that in whatever we are experiencing, God is somehow working out His purpose in our lives.

We might ask: just what the Lord's purpose for our lives is?

This is a recurrent question for many.

Related to it comes another question someone put to me just yesterday evening: *How can I know what God is doing in me and what it is that He wants from me?*

The Lord's purpose is always to lead us to share in His own paschal mystery. It is always to lead us into an experience of His own passover.

The notion of passage, passing over, is hinted at from the very outset of today's gospel text. (The lectionary translation speaks in terms of *crossing over*.)

I invite you to note that it is at the Lord's initiative that the disciples find themselves where they are in the boat.

Jesus had encouraged them to *pass over* to the other side of the lake.

It is as they *passed over* that the disciples were led to make their way through the storm.

I see a symbolic sense to Jesus' order to the disciples.

I also see several layers to the story.

I will name just a few.

We will remember from the Exodus story that on the other side of the sea-crossing lay the Promised Land: the place into which God led His people to bless them.

From other gospel passages we will recall that the farther shore was to become the place of encounter with the Risen Jesus.

Just think of how Jesus made Himself manifest to the disciples after the frightening experience of His having fallen asleep in death.

Risen from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples on the lake shore.

The peace and calm restored to the raging waters further evokes the resurrection experience.

(In each of the post-resurrection appearances, the Risen Jesus transmits the gift of peace.)

He is recognised as the Risen One by the disciples who find peace within themselves in His presence.

I am sure there are still many other layers to the story and the significance of Jesus' initial invitation addressed to the disciples to *pass over* to the other side of the lake.

There is one other aspect to the story that I suggest we consider in particular. I believe this detail merits some special consideration.

We are told that when the boat was at risk of sinking *Jesus was asleep at the stern*.

This detail of the story speaks into something we can all experience at times.

In all our lives there are moments when, for all intents and purposes, the Lord seems to be asleep and, in His slumber, unconcerned by our plight.

There are moments when we are confronted and challenged and even deeply disturbed by the Lord's silence and apparent somnolence.

What is important at such times is to remember what today's gospel passage shows us: namely, the fact that the Lord is *on board* with us.

He is *on board*, even at those moments when it feels as if He does not care about what we are going through.

Yes, even as the Lord seems to be asleep (let us dare to say, really is asleep, for He was not just pretending in the story), He is nonetheless present with us. He is present within us!

Reading this gospel passage in a paschal perspective (something I suggested we should do at the outset of this reflection), I dare to link it with Jesus' own experience of God's apparent absence. This experience of God's apparent absence is something Jesus expressed unashamedly in His prayer upon the cross. In the passion narrative we hear Jesus cry out, His heart torn asunder, as it were: *My*

*God, My God, why have You abandoned me?*

At that moment Jesus was in the storm-tossed sea. He was confronted with the raging attacks of others coming at Him. Faced with this surge of violent hate and aggressive rejection, Jesus was led to doubt His very self.

For Jesus calm and peace came again, even while still in the drama of His passion. Having worked through His anguish and pain, Jesus came to express this in a subsequent prayer, prayed upon the cross: *Into Your hands, O Lord, I commend my Spirit.*

Note what we see happening here.

What we see happening is Jesus having journeyed from a feeling of abandonment by God into a sense of being held by Him. This led Jesus into a readiness to commit Himself anew to the One whom He knew to be there for Him.

In the short gospel text heard this morning we see the whole of humanity, the whole of the Church and each one of our individual lives represented.

Like the disciples in the story, I suspect we often find ourselves still asking that question we are told they asked when the storm was calmed and they were brought through safely from peril into safety: *Who is this man? Who is this Jesus?*

Where we meet the disciples this morning, they had not quite arrived at an answer to that question. It will take them a while yet to do so.

They saw the storm calmed and they marvelled, but did not yet fully understand who Jesus was.

It is as if today's gospel sees the disciples led one step further on the way to discovering something of Jesus' identity as Son of God, but there was still a way to go.

The disciples' journey continues for all of us today.

The journey to the other shore is a journey to be with Christ in the Promised Land, that place of freedom and of resurrection life to which God calls us.

We are not there yet, but, every so often, we are graced to be given a foretaste of the life to come. We are accorded a foretaste of deep inner peace, relief and release from all that binds us.

Freedom from fear is the end to which we are called. We arrive there when we come to realise that no matter what (even in the midst of the worst storms of life) we are held safely in God's love.

On the journey to the farther shore we must learn to savour the graced moments accorded to us on life's sea voyage.

A line of poetry that has spoken to me for some years comes back to mind this morning. I share it with you as I draw this reflection to a close.

It is a call to: *Be still and Return to the place of peace.*

That place the poet calls our *Holy Island*.

(The poet who wrote these lines was evidently inspired by one very special place in these islands: Lindisfarne, also called Holy Island, but, more than a particular place, our *Holy Island*, our *place of peace*, can be anywhere. I see it as a place within us.)

Let me conclude by quoting a few lines from the writings of the David Adam, an Anglican priest, former Warden of Holy Island (Lindisfarne).

I hear these lines, a prayer formulated by David Adam, as tying in with today's gospel passage and helping us respond to its message in prayer.

Adam writes:

*Calm me, O Lord, as You calmed the storm.  
Still me, O Lord, and keep me from harm.  
Let all tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me, Lord, in Your peace.*

I readily make those words mine today and I invite you to make them yours.

Amen!