

PROPER 14 A

Matthew 14: 22-33

The Barque is Sinking

This gospel is both rich and timely. It relates to us in so many ways today as it did back in the time it was written, a terrible time when the Romans had just burned down the temple, slaughtered and deported love people, and murdered Peter and Paul. No wonder the early church feeling itself sinking, preserved this gospel, so that today's church resonates with it.

“Meanwhile the boat was being tossed about by the waves...”

And, today, like Peter, we are frightened.

Globally, think of how planet Earth is being tossed about as never before.

Whatever the reasons, our climate is changing:

average temperatures have risen dramatically in recent decades have been the warmest in 1500 years. Glaciers are melting, seas are rising, and animals and barrier reefs are becoming extinct.

Politically, the threats of Russia and North Korea are truly alarming, the non-stop wars and butchery abroad continue, the displacement of millions goes on and on, and at home our murder statistics daily expand to new records.

We have homeless people in the land of plenty and the wildest skyrocketing financial inequality in the past half century.

Socially and morally, we have lost our moorings.

All the surveys show discontent.

The old moral culture of accepted norms that once united us
has broken into competing ideologies.

A pervasive secular progressivism and the glorification of the individual
has emptied our souls, dismantled our neighborhoods,
and fractured our relationships.

Consumerism has replaced concern,
outer image has replaced inner character,
and celebrities have replaced Saints.

And then there's us, everyday Christians.

From early times, the boat, or the "***Barque of Peter,***"
was a metaphor for the Church.

As then, so now, it also is being violently tossed about.
It's being overwhelmed by the waves of sin, loss,
and persecution such as never before.

There's the stain of the sexual abuse scandal,
the official dismissal of religion from the public square,
and the decline of church attendance.

Most Bishops will tell you that they have had to close some parishes
and combine a few in order to carry on local ministries.

I don't have to tell you about attendance at Mass on Sundays, it's down.

There is a critical shortage of priests. The young have disappeared.

And on a personal level, there are things that frighten us.

Parents are frightened because they can't control
the institutional secularism that pervades our society:
schools without God, soccer games on Sunday,
or stores open on Thanksgiving and Christmas Day.

Easter sales start on the first Sunday of Lent,
and there is a terrible drug scourge that currently sweeps the country.

Seniors are frightened of disability
and the coming day when family takes away their car keys.
Mid-lifers are frightened of losing their jobs or having a midlife crisis.

Teenagers are frightened of being counted out by the *“in”* crowd,
of getting too few *“likes”* on Facebook.

Children are frightened of the dark, their parents quarrels and divorce,
and of being picked on and being different.

For Peter in the sinking boat, it was a combination of
the destructive wind, the massive waves and the terror of drowning
that frightened him, but these are some of the things that frighten us.

So now, by this time, if you came here today,
anxious to hear the good news, then you're winding up depressed.

Sorry about that – but it's all true.

But remember, that's only half of the gospel.

It's time to move to the other half and we, as Christians,
need to take grasp of the underlying hope which it gives.

That hope is found in the gospel's heartfelt two lines.

The first line is, ***“Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid.”***

The second line is,

“Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter.”

Yes, from our fears and concerns,

the image we need to clasp to our souls in these times,

is Jesus amid the waves, saying, ***“It is I. Do not be afraid,”***

and stretching out his hand to us

Remember, when corruption was about to drown both Church and State

He raised up the poor man from Assisi.

When the French Revolution profaned the Cathedral of Notre Dame

in Paris, the aftermath saw a great flowering spirituality.

The world has always been seeded with people

who grasped the hand of Jesus and made a difference.

On our calendar of this August alone

we will find people like Saints Dominic

who founded the Dominicans, Francis who founded the Franciscans,
and Ignatius who founded the Jesuits,

Maximilian Kolbe who took the place of

an about-to-be executed prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp,

and a Catholic journalist James Foley

who decided to stand with the suffering and was beheaded by ISIS.

September brings us Saint Peter Claver, who ministered to the slaves.

Then there's people like Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Florence Nightingale,

And queen Emma of Hawaii who built hospitals

to care for her people ravaged by diseases

introduced by the Europeans,

and Quaker Tom Fox

who went on a mission to Iraq to work for peace

and assist the families of imprisoned Iraqis.

In 2005 he was kidnapped by All Qaeda and killed.

His body was found on a garbage heap.

Finally, if the Church in the West is sinking,

the Church in Africa is flourishing.

I could go on and on with my list, but you get the idea.

So much is wrong, so much is frightening, so much is sinking.

But too, so much good is being done everyday

by people who have made a difference, who have reached out to

the Someone who comforted them with His words,

“Do not be afraid” and, hand in hand, inspired their deeds.

The good news is that there are millions today

who still reach out to grasp the outstretched hand of Jesus,

and one day, God will raise up one of them

as God has always done in the past.

I'd like to think that person might be among us here today.

Don't sell yourselves short.

There's a hand reaching to you.

Like Peter, catch it and save us.

May it be so for us in our hearing this day!

Amen.