



12TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR B

In the name of the Father +, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The sea can at one and the same time be a beautiful and terrifying thing: it can be as calm as a mill-pond one moment and the next it can be surging in waves of many feet. Its waters not only give and sustains life, but they can also take it away, and are capable of devastation on a cataclysmic scale. I don't know if any of you have been at sea in a storm, but when I was young and was out in the North Sea in a small fishing boat when a storm suddenly whipped up, it was small comfort to know that God had created the seas and all they contain, and that he was ultimately in control of them. I have never felt so glad to be on dry land.

The disciples in this morning's Gospel reading must have experienced the same sort of fear. Schooled as they were in the teachings of the Hebrew Scriptures, they would have known the text we heard from Job in our first reading: that it was God who created the sea and laid its boundaries; they would have know the Psalm which speaks of the men who went to the sea in ships and saw the mighty deeds of the Lord, who stilled the raging of the waters and the wind in answer to their prayers. The disciples would have known all this, and yet, at the time at which they were experiencing the immense forces of nature, the teachings of Scripture brought little solace: as any human being would be, they were frightened that they were going to die. Theirs was an entirely human response to the uncontrollable might of the wind and the waves. Their lives were totally out of their own control, and their fate lay, ultimately, in the hands of God. Because, to their mind, the raging of the wind and the sea represented chaos: they believed that huge monsters lived in the raging seas, and that it was only God that could bring order to chaos, as he had in the beginning when he created the ordered universe, and set limits which the sea might not pass. The raging sea not only represented chaos, but evil, so it is not surprising that those disciples were so afraid.

What is surprising in this Gospel story is the behaviour of Jesus: not only was he unconcerned by the storm, but he was able to sleep through it. This was profoundly disturbing for his disciples, and left them feeling alone and exposed. How could the teacher they had followed and were coming to trust and have faith in not seem in the slightest bit concerned that they were going to drown? It is no wonder that they cried out to him in despair, 'Master, do you not care?' What the disciples had failed to understand was that Jesus, the divine Word and Wisdom of God, had been present at the creation of the world, when the chaos of the universe had been brought to order by the Spirit's power. Jesus was able to be so calm because he knew that, ultimately, God was in control of the situation, even though he seemed very far from it at the time. Of course, in this miracle of the calming of the storm, Jesus showed his divinely given power over the forces of nature, and showed that he was God's Son by demonstrating his ability to bring order to chaos. It would be a while before the disciples realised who Jesus really was, and were able to confess him as the Son of God, but this must have been one of the miracles that helped to open their eyes. 'Who can this be?' they say, 'Even the wind and the sea obey him'.

We are like the disciples: we might not have been in the situation in which they found themselves, but all of us encounter situations in our lives when we find ourselves crying out

to God in despair, ‘Master, do you not care?’ The death of a loved one; one’s own personal illness or the serious illness of someone we love; the loss of a job or financial hardship: all of these are times when we, quite rightly and humanly, cry out to God in anger and despair ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ For these are indeed times in our lives when we feel that God has abandoned us, however faithful we might have been to him, and we feel as if he just doesn’t care. These feelings are entirely natural: look again at the example of the disciples. They had the Son of God himself with them in the boat, and they were frightened, they felt deserted and alone, they didn’t know where to turn or what to do. How much more difficult it is for us, who walk by faith and not by sight. And yet, in the end, even though it seemed to them as if he didn’t care, it was to Jesus that the disciples turned. Though he seemed so unconcerned and detached from the situation, he was there, and was able to restore peace and calm, bring order to chaos and restore their faith.

It’s very easy to say that whatever happens to us in our lives, that we must trust in God because he is always there, because the reality is that it doesn’t always feel like that. There are many times in the Christian’s life, if we are honest, when we question where God is or how he could let terrible things happen to his faithful people and those whom they love; there are times when we feel utterly alone. But the message of faith is that God is indeed present with us in all areas of our lives, and in the most troubled times, as well as in the most joyful. He never leaves nor forsakes us, even though we may feel that he has. As God spoke to Job from the heart of the tempest, so, in the storms and tempests of our lives, he speaks to us with that calm, reassuring, authoritative voice with which Jesus spoke to the wind and the sea, and he says to us, ‘Peace! Be still!’

It may be years after we have been through a traumatic event that we are able to look back and see that God was indeed present with us, though at the time we did not feel he was. God doesn’t blame us for that, nor does he punish us, but he gently asks us the question that Jesus asked those disciples in that boat, ‘Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?’ It is only through faith that we are able to see God’s guiding hand, and it is only through faith that we are able to come to terms with the difficulties that we suffer in this life. It is through the support of the prayers of our brothers and sisters in the Church that we are upheld, it is through clinging to the Sacraments that we are nourished and given strength when all other hope is gone. As the writer of the book of Proverbs taught, ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.’

Life is no easier for the Christian than it is for those who don’t believe, but what our faith does give us is hope: hope that when this life is over and the pains that we endure in it are past, we will see what it was all truly about, with all of its joys and sorrows, its pains and its tears. The God who created order out of chaos in the beginning, and whose beloved Son stilled the raging of the seas is still with us, bringing us joy where there is sorrow, hope where there is doubt and peace where there is pain.

When we cry out ‘Master, do you not care?’ may we have the trust and the faith to hear our Lord’s answer, ‘Why are you so frightened? I am with you always, to the end of time.’

Amen.