

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

If I was looking for a place where I would feel most helpless and vulnerable, I think I would find it in a small boat in the middle of a storm. With the wind howling and the waves crashing over the sides of the boat I would probably be even too fearful to be seasick.

I have never been in that situation, but in today's gospel, the disciples of Jesus found themselves battling the wind and the waves on the sea of Galilee. The sea of Galilee is not a big area of water, but the wind is sometimes funneled along the Jordan Valley in such a way that the sea can become quite rough and dangerous. Some of those disciples were experienced fishermen and perhaps would have known not to sail that day had not Jesus told them to cross to the other side. And he was no help to them at all as they faced the storm. He was asleep in the stern of the boat.

How often have we felt that Jesus was asleep when we needed him? How often have we felt that we have been in the middle of a storm only because we were doing something that we really did not want to do?

Can we learn something from today's gospel? We might wonder first about that invitation to cross to the other side of the lake. It must be more than just another boat ride. In Mark's gospel to cross to the other side is an

invitation to experience something new; to be with people who are different from us. Jewish people lived on the western side of the lake; mainly non-Jewish people were on the eastern side. All of us can feel quite uncomfortable when we are in the company of strangers. It takes some courage to connect well with them. It takes some courage for us to make welcome new parishioners.

We might notice in our gospel that there were other boats with them. Sometimes we don't notice the other boats. When things go wrong for us, we can often feel very alone. We can feel that we are the only ones out on the lake in a storm. Noticing those other boats, noticing those who are suffering with us can often save us from feeling too sorry for ourselves.

What the disciples could not understand was that Jesus chose to have a nap when they needed him to help bail out the water. "Master, do you not care? We are going down." But when Jesus is awoken, he acts quickly. He does not pick up a bucket but rebukes the wind and the sea as only God can. "Quiet now! Be calm!" And then he rebukes his own disciples for being so lacking in faith. "Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?"

None of us would like to hear Jesus say that to us. We would all claim to be people who believe in Jesus. And

yet all of us would have to admit that there are times when we cannot seem to act as people of faith. There are times when we cannot put our trust in the God who promised to look after us and keep us safe. Part of the difficulty may be that we want God to act as we think God should. We don't give God the freedom to act as God wants to act. We are wanting God to change the world when God is working hard to change us. We are looking for physical healing when God is working on a deeper healing that will enable us to live with our sickness and disabilities. We are praying that nobody will hurt us when God is teaching us how to forgive.

At the end of our gospel today we are told that the disciples were filled with awe and we hear them say to each other, "Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him." Maybe that is something that we can pray for this week: to be filled with awe as reflect upon our experience of God at work in our lives and in the lives of those we love. Perhaps we could pray that we might be able to notice when God is acting as only God can.

Our first reading today comes from near the end of the Book of Job. That book is a wonderful reflection upon the problem of suffering in our world. Job was a very good man who had to suffer terrible illnesses and misfortune. He remained faithful to God throughout his sufferings. But his healing really only came when he was

able to admit that although he could not understand why he was called to suffer so much, God was still in charge of the world. Like the disciples in today's gospel, he fell on his knees in awe of God. We heard a little of God's reply to Job in our first reading today.

The psalm we prayed today is a prayer that remembers that God does come to our aid, even in the worse of storms. "Then they cried to the Lord in their need and he rescued them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper: all the waves of the sea were hushed. They rejoiced because of the calm and he led them to the haven they desired. Let them thank the Lord for his love, for the wonders he does for all." May we be able to pray that psalm this week for ourselves and for the many people that we might know who are not yet able to pray it for themselves.