

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As people of faith we are often subconsciously looking out for signs of the presence of God. We look for signs that confirm the good decisions that we make. We look for signs of God caring for us and those we love when sickness comes or other things go wrong. Sometimes signs of God's presence are easily seen. Other times God seems to be hiding from us.

The disciples of Jesus would have spent a lot of time looking at Jesus to try to see signs of God's presence in him. Today's gospel tells the story of how the disciples of Jesus were able to make a big step in understanding who Jesus was. The evening didn't start so well for them. Jesus sent them on ahead in the boat without him. He chose to send the crowds away and then spend a long time in prayer alone. I can't help thinking that the prayer prepared him for the way that he was going to later reveal who he was. I could imagine that in that time of prayer his Father assured him again of his mission. I could imagine that Jesus came away from the prayer more aware of who he was.

The disciples began to experience a fierce storm with a head wind that prevented them from making any progress across the lake. We are told that they were far

out on the lake when Jesus came to them. By now it was somewhere between 3 and 6 am. They thought that it was a ghost appearing to them. But Jesus assures them. "Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." Those words were the words that God had so often used to assure his people of his loving presence. Peter, speaking on behalf of the others, read those words rightly. He could see too that Jesus was doing something that only God could do. The psalms had often spoken of God's power to control the sea and put the waves under his feet. Here was Jesus walking on the sea. "Lord if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water." Peter was asking Jesus to share with him something of his power as God. Jesus freely does that and Peter begins to make his way towards him.

But Peter takes his eyes off Jesus for a moment and looks at how strong the wind is. Once he lost sight of Jesus he began to sink. But to his great credit he cried out to Jesus to save him. Jesus put his hand out at once and held him. "Man of little faith, why did you doubt." But it was this man of little faith who with the other disciples bowed down before Jesus and proclaimed, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

I was thinking about this gospel in the context of today being the end of Vocations awareness week. It is a day

when we pray that those whom God may be choosing to become priests and religious may have every opportunity to hear that call and generously respond to it. Of course, to hear a call from God to serve Him and the people he loves, people need to experience God's presence. We need to be open to the signs of God's presence. It was much easier in the recent past to do this because most young people grew up in families where they were taught to recognise the signs of God's presence. Prayer was a more normal part of family life. Our first reading today from the first Book of Kings helps us to realize that God is often not where you would expect Him to be. God did not appear in the earthquake or the fire, but in a gentle breeze. When we might be looking for God in the spectacular God is already here in the ordinary.

The first disciples of Jesus may not have thought of themselves as being particularly religious but they grew up praying the psalms. Those psalms prepared them to recognise in Jesus things that only God could do. With their little faith, they wanted to be able to share somehow in the work of God, as Jesus did. I sometimes think of myself as being very fortunate to grow up in family where praying at home and gathering for Mass was a priority. In an age before Television and computers we prayed the Rosary

together at home. I have a very early memory of my father kneeling beside me as I said my evening prayers. I was encouraged to be an altar server. I never thought of my family as being perfect but they used well what little faith they had in their generous service of others and their concern for what was right.

I suppose that is the way that I have tried to live out my vocation as a priest. I have had a sense that God can work through me without me needing to get everything right all the time. Like Peter I feel the force of the wind often and begin to lose my nerve. But I know that when I cry out for help as he did, then Jesus takes my hand and prevents me from drowning. That Jesus might need to say to me, "Man of little faith, why did you doubt?" is OK. I know that the good I do as a priest does not depend upon me, but on the power of the Lord at work in and through me.

Surely, we can all say that. As we live our vocations as parents or grandparents God lives within us working for good. As we try to contribute to the community in which we live God works through us in our service of others. Our desire to make a difference in our world as young people is an expression of God's desire to keep creating a world of beauty and justice. We are all people of little faith that God uses well for others.