

## WALKING ON WATER - 19<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY A

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Jesus said to Peter: *'Come to me across the water!'*

They say that *'life begins at forty'*. Some of you may have personal experience of that. But just when he was about to turn forty, a man called Peter – he lives thousands of miles away - had a very bad year.

He crashed his car. He was drunk at the time, so he lost his driving licence. He needed that driving licence for his job, so he lost his job. When he lost his job, he could not keep up the mortgage payments on his house. His wife divorced him and took their two children away. He took the only two options he thought he had left in the world - he went home to live with his parents and he started to drink heavily.

His mother was very old and confined to a wheelchair. But the only thing she asked of him was to take her to church every day. So, every day, he wheeled her to church, where he listened to a very long and boring homily by a very old and decrepit priest. He got to thinking: *'What a hopeless old man! I could do better myself!'*

It was a bizarre thought for someone who by now barely believed in God. But the thought stuck with him. Every day when took his mother to Mass, the thought grew and grew. He went to make his confession, a long one. Next he started to receive Holy Communion. And all the time, the thought kept growing within him that he should be a priest.

When Vocations Sunday came around, the old priest gave a particularly long and boring homily, during which he asked all those present to ask themselves whether they might sense within themselves a call to the priesthood or religious life. After Mass, Peter took his courage in both hands and went to see the priest in the sacristy. He told him he thought he had a vocation. First the priest was shocked and then laughed at him. Didn't he know that married men could not become priests?

Peter went away humiliated. In fact he was so angry that he wrote a long letter to the bishop complaining about the attitude of the priest. The bishop wrote back saying that the old priest was, in his opinion, one of the holiest men in the diocese, but that if Peter felt that he wanted to consider a vocation, the bishop would be happy to meet him.

So, feeling a little foolish, and not really sure what there was to talk about, Peter went to see the bishop. The gospel for that day was the one we've heard today - Peter hoped it might be a good sign. They spoke for a long time and, for the first time, Peter opened his heart. And, in talking about his deepest hopes, he discovered that he really did have

a burning desire to be a priest - the conviction to give his whole life in the service of God and God's people – a conviction that is given only by God himself. At the end of their conversation, the bishop told him frankly that he believed Peter had a genuine vocation, but he had no idea whether within the rules of the Church he could become a priest. He would see what he could do. Peter went home feeling the best he had all that year.

A week later, he was called to see the bishop again. The bishop explained that there was a provision in canon law after all, for men in his position to become priests. Ten years ago Peter was ordained and is now working as a priest in a parish in England.

There are times in life when the things God asks of us seem so difficult that we conclude all too quickly that they are simply impossible. We even doubt that the things God is asking of us are really coming from the Lord at all. Might they not be coming from the bad Spirit?

Sometimes the only way to find out the truth is to ask the Lord to tell us to come to him across the water of our fears and doubts. And when, like Peter the Apostle, we start to sink beneath the waves, to reach out towards the Lord with both hands, and say to him not once, not twice, but over and over and over again: *'Lord, save me!' 'Lord, save me!'*