

TO WHOM DO WE TURN IN A STORM? 12TH SUNDAY B

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We are fascinated with water. It's impossible to listen to the *'Moonlight Sonata'* of Beethoven without thinking of moonlight flickering and shimmering across the surface of a placid lake. We never tire of looking at lakes, waterfalls, rivers and oceans. Water is just so attractive, appealing and soothing. On the other hand, water out of control is simply terrifying. Think of the terrible tsunamis and avalanches recently that have destroyed lives, buildings, landscapes and livelihoods. Mark's story today about the high winds and giant waves battering the boat in which Jesus is fast asleep reminds us of the terrifying and destructive power of water.

For a little while the apostles with Jesus in the boat let him sleep on. But once water starts to fill the boat and threatens to drown them, they wake him in panic and keep shouting: *'Master, don't you care that we are sinking.'* Their blunt words work. Jesus wakes up, stands and rebukes the wind as if it was a person and says to the sea: *'Quiet now! Be calm!'* There and then the wind drops and all is calm and peaceful again. Once more God the Creator is in control of his creation.

But Jesus doesn't leave it at that. He has something sharp to say to those panic merchants who doubted that he would help them: *'Why were you so afraid?'* he asks, *'and why have you no faith at all [when things go wrong]?'* There and then their fear turns to awe and reverence as they say to one another: *'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'*

What does this story mean for you and me? How is it good news? What can we take from it? It's obviously a story of a wonderful nature miracle, in which the divine Jesus calms a dangerous storm. But if we hear it more as a symbol of the presence and power of Jesus in the storms of our lives, it will be even more valuable and relevant.

The risen and divine Jesus gives us peace in the storm of sadness and sorrow. When that storm comes as come it must, he reminds us of the glory of the life to come. He tells us that there are many rooms in our Father's house (Jn 14:2), and that he has gone ahead to prepare a place for us (Jn 14:2-3). He changes the darkness of death into the sunshine of everlasting life, and replaces our distress with comfort and peace.

The risen and divine Jesus gives us peace in the middle of our personal and family problems, when we don't know either the best way forward or the best way out. At such a crossroads of life, we can ask him, *'Lord, what road should I take?'* The best way may then become so much clearer, and bring us calmness and peace of mind as well.

The risen and divine Jesus gives us peace in the storm of anxiety. The chief enemy of peace is worry – worry about ourselves, worry about those we love, worry about our world, worry about our church community, and worry about the future. What is particularly worrying to

us at present? Perhaps it's the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa. Perhaps it's the terrorists of ISIS. Perhaps it's the attacks and counter-attacks between Palestinians and Israelis, the menace of global warming, the cruel treatment of asylum-seekers, and the prevalence of AIDS, abortion, drug addiction, sexual and physical abuse.

When the frightened companions of Jesus look to him to save them from the storms raging both outside and inside them, they start to calm down. So too with us! If we look to Jesus to stay with us even when we are being battered by the wildest storms of life, deep down inside we will experience his gift of peace. In all our storms of worry and anxiety, whatever they might be, Jesus keeps saying to us: *'Trust in God still and trust in me'* (Jn 14:1). How can he say that and say it so confidently? Simply because he knows just how much God loves us and how unconditional and everlasting is God's love for us. God cares even when a little sparrow falls to the ground (Mt 6:26). Jesus knows on the one hand that even when bad things happen to good people, God has not inflicted those things. Jesus also knows on the other hand that in all our troubles God will respond to us when we seek his help and guidance. So in every storm of anxiety, Jesus offers us God's gift of peace.

In short, then, the good news from God today is that no power or force, however frightening, can match the power and presence of God in the person of Jesus. God's good news today is also loud and clear that to journey with Jesus is to journey through storms, not around them. No matter what happens he will be *'God in the boat'* for us and will stay on board with us. So let us give heartfelt thanks to God in the rest of our Eucharist together today, for all the signs of the care of Jesus, and especially for the gift of his peace in the middle of every storm that comes our way.

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