

A small airplane pilot said to me, “Did you know that an eagle knows when a storm is approaching long before it breaks? When pilots see an eagle soaring in the sky they know a storm is approaching.” The eagle will fly to some high spot in a tree and wait for the winds to come. When the storm hits, the eagle sets its wings so that the wind will pick it up and lift it above the storm. While the storm rages below, the eagle is soaring above it. The eagle does not escape the storm. It simply uses the storm to lift it higher. It rises on the winds that bring the storm.

When the storms of life come upon us, and all of us will experience them, we can rise above them by setting our minds and our beliefs toward God. The storms do not have to overcome us. We can allow God’s power to lift us above them. We too can soar above the storms in our lives. Remember, it is not the storms and fears of life that weigh us down, it is how we handle them.

The Gospel captures the fear of the Apostles, especially Peter’s fear. It also captures their renewed faith in Christ. The story in today’s Gospel takes place while the Apostles are returning by boat across the Sea of Galilee, having left Jesus on His own to spend some time in prayer. Suddenly a storm blows up and their boat is in danger of sinking. Although they are experienced sailors, they find themselves battling hopelessly for their lives against the raging storm.

Then in the storm they see what appears to be a ghost walking toward them on the water. Peter recognizes that it is not a ghost but Jesus walking toward them, and Peter emerges as the spokesman for the Apostles. He has faith enough to venture beyond what is sensible. Peter asks Jesus, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” In reply, Jesus says to Peter, “Come.” And though Peter obeys Jesus and sets out across the water, his faith soon lets him down.

Peter begins to sink, not because he notices the wind is blowing strongly and the high waves, but because he focuses on himself rather than focusing on Jesus. At least Peter has faith enough to cry out, “Lord! Save me!” It is in this moment of sinking that Peter finds Jesus’ strong hand; in this moment of sinking that he hears Jesus’ voice telling him not to be afraid.

From the story of the storm, we begin to see that a disciple of Jesus is someone who can have doubts and fears but then hears the words of Jesus saying, "Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid." The Apostles know from experience that on their own they cannot withstand all the storms, fears and sinking experiences of life. But by now they have learned to reach out in prayer to God and they know that His hand reaches out to them.

The Gospel reading is not just about a storm on the lake but also an analogy of the storms of life that we face in our life. You and I may not be caught in a storm at sea but we are all caught in the storms of life, those times when our lives seem to be coming apart at the seams and only the most extreme measures are sufficient to hold things together and get us through.

The storms of life may be to do with a family matter, a broken marriage, a financial issue, an illness, an upcoming surgery, a death of a loved one, aging, an emotional problem, depression, battling addictions, doubts, being able to make a living, keeping our family safe and one of the biggest fears of all, death.

Perhaps you know someone who is facing some kind of fear, perhaps an upcoming operation, fear of losing children who left the church, fear of the future because of a broken marriage or death of a loved one.

Whatever the storm, there is no mistaking the sense of desperation and fear, and the willingness to try almost anything to escape the storm. It is through our own storms in life that we need to believe so strongly in God and not focus on ourselves but focus on God and His strength that He offers us in our times of fear.

If we know our God and recognize Him, then, like Peter, we can walk in faith on the troubled waters of life. In the midst of storms in life we can know peace, because we do not live in fear. We do not fear suffering, loss or helplessness. We do not fear the future. We do not even fear death, not because of our own power but because when we know our God, we know our future, we know our value and we know what awaits us.

Regrettably the storms of life are the times when we are weakest and when many people separate themselves from prayer, from the Church, from fellow Catholics and try to go it alone. Yet, these are precisely the times when we need to reach out to our Lord with all our being, and be more constant in prayer, gathering more frequently with our Catholic family so that we might live the Gospel even more faithfully. Jesus is

there, through the life of His Church and the Sacraments, reaching out to save us in the storm.

In a storm, the boat is the safest place to be. The Apostles would feel protected and secure. The sensible thing to do is to stay put and ride out the storm. Similarly, when we are facing storms in life, the safest place to be is in the Church. In the Church we stay put and ask Jesus to help us ride out the storm.

As we face our own storms, may we make the right choices so that we will stand straight and tall in our faith and remain in the Church, even when we are tossed about by the hard knocks of life that just seem too hard to bear. At times like these, our faith may falter and we may doubt that God cares for us, or even that He exists. Yet, it is in these very situations that calling out to Jesus can *and will* strengthen our faith. When we truly *listen* for Jesus' gentle voice, His voice will be heard even in the midst of any of the storms in life we may be facing.

May our faith in Jesus grow ever more abundant and powerful to fill our hearts, our minds, and our lives with trust in Him when we the face storms in our life. A faith firmly rooted in Christ is not developed in a day, but over a lifetime. Do not look at the waves; rather, look to Jesus who *walks on the waters*. This is the calling of Christ: *Walk by faith, not by sight*.

We need not become casualties on the sea of life. All we have to do is echo the words of Peter, "Lord, save me!" We can trust that Jesus has an outstretched hand to catch us and tell us not fear, for He is always with us. Like an eagle, we can soar above the storms of life.