

In today's Gospel, Jesus says to His Apostles, "*Let us go across to the other side*" of the Sea of Galilee, which is predominantly Gentile region. Up until now Jesus has taught and healed in Jewish areas, but now He travels to a pagan, Gentile area. By crossing the Sea of Galilee Jesus now extends His ministry to the Gentile peoples, and by bringing His Apostles with Him, He is foreshadowing the early Church's mission to the Gentiles.

St. Mark tells us that a violent storm has suddenly come up and waves are breaking over the boat. Sudden storms like this are common on the Sea of Galilee because of the high hills and steep valleys that border it. And what is Jesus doing during this terrible storm? He is sleeping on a cushion in the stern of the boat! The Apostles are terrified of the storm. These men are very familiar with sailing on the Sea; however, the fear they now feel with the violence of the storm shakes their confidence and they are in great need of Our Lord's calm strength to save them.

The first thing to reflect upon is that Jesus was there in the center of the storm. He is on the boat while the waves came crashing over. *But the key is that He is there.* This tells us that whenever we experience a *storm* in our lives, Jesus is there in the midst of it. He is not far away, rather, *He is right there.*

The second thing to reflect upon is that we also notice that Jesus is asleep. One thing we can take from this is that Jesus awaits our prayer. He waits for us to turn to Him in the midst of the storm. That must be our first thought whenever we feel overwhelmed or challenged by life's circumstances.

Notice that the *prayer* of the Apostles is similar to how we may pray at times, "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" The sense of it seems to be "*How can you sleep at a time like this? Are You indifferent to our drowning?*" Jesus answers their prayer by rebuking the wind and saying to the waters, "*Peace! Be still!*" The storm is instantly replaced by a "*great calm.*" But this is not the end of the story. The most important part is still to come. Jesus then asks His Apostles, "*Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?*" Jesus is saying that faith has the power to cast out their fear.

I am reminded of a story about a storm. There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of what peace would look like. Many artists tried, and the king looked at all their pictures. But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake looked like a perfect mirror with peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too, but these mountains were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This picture did not look peaceful at all.

But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rushing of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest, in perfect peace. She was a picture of tranquility.

Which picture do you think won the prize? You might think it was the first picture, but no, the king chose the second picture. Do you know why?

*“Because,”* explained the king, *“peace does not necessarily mean that you have to be in a place where is no noise, trouble, or storms. Peace can be in the midst of all those things and yet there can still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”*

And this is the real meaning of peace Jesus is giving us. Jesus is like the tiny bush in the rock in which we built our nest. Despite the angry water, or the angry world, or the angry storms of life, Jesus wants us to know that we can find rest in His loving arms.

This story can easily make a connection between the storms the Apostles were experiencing at sea and the storms we experience with the trials and sufferings in our own lives. *What are those storms?* Troubles, disappointments and misfortunes come our way from time to time and severely test our faith. Although we will not always readily admit it, sometimes we feel disappointed with God when set-backs bring sadness, anger, suffering, death, depression and anxiety into our homes, into our lives, into our world. How wonderful that Jesus can calm all those storms. He is there for us with His peace if we just turn our fears over to Him.

We come to the truth that Christ is with us in the boat. When we are flooded by storms in life, we are tempted to say with the Apostles, “*Lord, don’t You care?*” We can understand storms happening to others but not to ourselves. In all our storms, Christ is not simply beside us in our boat but within us.

Today’s Gospel can be misleading. We should know that God is often silent as a way of calling us to Himself so that we turn to Him in trust and confidence. Jesus will not make all our storms in life go away. That would be unrealistic. Throughout our lives we will encounter storms of one kind or another. Severe storms in our life can test our faith in God. The mere fact that we are trying to follow Jesus is not a guarantee that we will be spared the storms. When the storms of life strike us, we must not feel that God has abandoned us, much less that He is punishing us for our sins.

We must remember that Jesus is always with us, especially during the storms we face in life. When the storms are taking place, Jesus seeks to deepen our trust in His love and provision. Personal storms can lead us to new life with God. Physical loss can be a moment of spiritual gain. Illness can lead to spiritual renewal.

Recall the words of the king in the story, “*peace means to be in the midst of all those storms of life and still be calm in your heart.*” Jesus is the strong “branch” that holds us up and embraces us in our storms. We await that great moment when “*the stormy sea will be no more.*” Until then, we can trust that Christ is within us to keep us strong and bring us safely through every storm we are enduring.

The message of faith given to us today in the Gospel story of the storm is to remind us to call out to Jesus when we are afraid of the storms in life, as the Apostles did. When storms of life well up around us and rock our small boat and bring fear, we must listen to the voice of Jesus comforting us.

Jesus is not asleep but is always with us and He knows both our fears and our needs. In the boat that is our Church, we will find Jesus waiting for us. In the Holy Mass Jesus prays for us and He gives us His Body and Blood to nourish and strengthen us in our storms.

In order to grow our faith, we need to deepen our relationship with Jesus by spending more time with Him daily, and include Him in our thoughts and decisions through

prayer. We can read the Gospels and spend time with others who also believe in Him so we can learn from their experience. *This is a lived faith.*

Reflect on what frightens you the most each day. What is it that shakes your faith? Turn to Jesus in the midst of that and know He is there ready to bring peace and calm. In loving Jesus, the storms with which we experience in life will be calmed, and our faith will grow stronger. In faith and in hope, let us now surrender our lives to God and be in total peace in the storms that surround our lives.