

Homily for the 12th Sun. in Ord. "B"
June 20-21, 2009

My Dad likes to tell a story that he claims is about his Grandfather. His Grandfather was a Swedish Immigrant who settled in Springfield, Oregon and became a fairly successful farmer. He was a thrifty man and like most farmers knew how to fix almost anything. One day he was up on the roof of the barn, repairing a leak. He lost his hold and began to slide down the roof. It was several stories to the ground, and in his panic, he yelled, "Lord save me!" Just then a nail caught his overalls and held him fast. When he realized what had happened, he yelled, "Forget it Lord, a nails got me".

I believe that many people find it hard to believe in miracles, even when they happen to us. It is hard to imagine that God really does care about us to intervene with the laws of nature.

Or perhaps we have never had the miracle we really prayed and hoped for. It convinces us that God just doesn't care.

So it is hard to understand why Jesus would rebuke the poor disciples trying to wake him up to help as their boat is sinking. Aren't true disciples supposed to run to their master in their moment of need? Isn't it a sign of their faith and trust in him that they call on him in this crisis? Didn't Jesus himself say, "**Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest**"? Why then does he reprimand the weary disciples who are simply overwhelmed in the face of the storm?

To make meaning of Jesus' rebuke we have to go back to the life situation of the early Christian community at the time the Gospel of Mark was written. Those Christians suffered terrible

persecution. They were frightened because many would have to pay for their faith in Jesus with their lives.

The Church at that time was like a boat sailing precariously through the stormy sea, in danger of being swamped by the waves. And even though Jesus had promised to be with his church, He was not intervening to put an end to the crisis. Even though he had promised that the gates of hell would not prevail over his church, the fact is that the church was being decimated.

How did the early Christians react to this crisis that threatened to swamp them like a storm? They turned to prayer – it was a sort of prayer of protest to Jesus who looks on and does nothing while his people are dying. Is Jesus sleeping in the boat while bark of Peter is sinking? Prayer was their calling out to Jesus to wake him up.

The reason Mark recalls this account of Jesus getting up and calming the rough sea is to let the Church know that even through this persecution, Jesus hears their prayers, Jesus is near them, and He will calm the storm and restore peace. Their prayer is not in vain. They must still trust in Jesus even though they cannot see His purpose and his plan clearly.

Mark has something even more to say to his fellow Christians in crisis. Intense crisis demands intense faith. What is expected of them and us in the face of life's struggles or persecution and crisis is a heroic faith.

Heroic faith in this situation might be demonstrated by those disciples who are content to let Jesus sleep through the storm even if it means going down with him. This is the faith of the martyrs who, though they would love Jesus to deliver them, are nevertheless prepared to die with him if he so wishes. This is the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before the blazing furnace when they said to the evil king Nebuchadnezzar,

If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.

It is easy enough to keep believing when at our least cry God would rouse himself and help us. The challenge today is to ask ourselves whether we are prepared to believe even when it is difficult. Can we believe when our culture and our neighbors say we are foolish to do so? Can we believe when scientists make fun of us for believing in miracles? Can we believe and trust Jesus even when it might mean that we would be persecuted and shunned or our children are barred from the best schools because we are Catholic and Christian?

I believe that we are seeing the beginning of the same situation that those early Christians experienced. Christians and especially Catholics today are being made to feel foolish for believing in God. A person who believes in miracles is made to feel ridiculous. But Christ is in the boat with us. If it seems like he's sleeping, we have to remember that he is still beside us. He will rouse himself, and though he might not respond in the way we want him to, he will respond to give us the courage and the strength we need to show him and the world that we are truly his disciples.