

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, "Let us go across to the other side." And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. He said to them, "Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?" And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

REFLECTION 1: THE VOICE OF THE SEA

Flight attendants always present a confident look and a smile as they assure us that 'In the unlikely event that we have to ditch at sea, you will find our seat cushions also double as flotation devices.' But once the plane is airborne, we are all in the hands of God. It was the same for the disciples in today's Gospel. Once the boat pushed out from the shore, they were on their own in an alien water world. Like most fishermen they would not have known how to swim – they were at the mercy of the wind, the waves and the integrity of the boat. Fragile and frightened, when the fury of the waves lashed around them, they knew that their only hope was Jesus. We today must have the confidence to ask: 'Who then is this whom even the wind and sea obey?'

Today we Christians find ourselves on board with Jesus in the storms around us and some of us think with alarm that Jesus seems to be asleep. After all it was Jesus who took the initiative for the crossing as they set out for the Eastern pagan banks of the lake. Then after the fatigue of the day, he fell asleep. Jesus slept even when it began to blow a gale – which caused panic among his companions. Later, on a certain Friday, Jesus will be engulfed in the sleep of death, and the faith of his friends will falter, for the present, they woke him up without ceremony. Aroused, Jesus stands up and, as though he was exorcising a demon, he rebukes the powers of death that crash against the boat.

Suddenly all is calm again and amazement takes hold of the disciples. They might have cried out in the words of the Psalmist; 'More majestic than the breakers of the sea the Lord is majestic in the heights' [Ps.93: 4]. In calming the storm Jesus has exercised a divine prerogative. And again as the Psalmist might have expressed it, 'they cried to the Lord in their need and he rescued them from their distress, he stilled the storm to a whisper' [Ps.106: 28].

As Mark wrote this Gospel passage, he was addressing himself to a persecuted and terrified Church exhorting her to have faith. In order to go to the pagans, it was necessary to quit the calm waters of Judaeo-Christianity and cross over to the other shore. They would have to jettison overboard the restrictive practices of Judaism that were holding them back and claiming the freedom of the calm and still waters of their newfound faith. They could only do so by turning for help to Him whom the sea and wind obey and who is always there in the boat, even when he seems to be asleep. The strange thing about Jesus is that one can never get away from him. As for ourselves, living in the storms of life after the worst recession in decades, should we not also cry out, in spite of everything, 'We believe that Jesus is God's Son!'