

Always Focus on Christ

19th Sunday of OT – August 09, 2020

A beloved priest was retiring after 40 years in the parish. The Bishop appointed a new pastor, but Fred, the parish council chairperson...just did not like him. After the new priest was there for a few weeks, Tom, another parishioner offered to take the new priest out fishing. Fred reluctantly agreed to use his boat.

The three of them got into the boat and motored out to the middle of the lake. When they stopped to fish, they realized that all their tackle had been left on the dock. Tom concluded that they would just have to go back and get it. The new priest said that would not be necessary, and got out of the boat, and started walking on the water towards the dock.

Fred, who refused to be impressed by the new priest's abilities, said, "See I told you he wasn't a good priest, he can't even swim."

I tell you this joke because sometimes, something is right in front of our eyes and we do not see it.

In the first reading, Elijah meets God on the mountain.

Mountains are high, and therefore the closest we can get to heaven,
and therefore are places when humans often encounter God.

Indeed El Shaddai can be translated as "God of the Mountain."

In the case of Elijah, he did not experience God in the storm, earthquake or fire,
but rather in the stillness of silence.

Perhaps there is a lesson for us,

that God is not found in the extra-ordinary, but in the ordinary.

Every one of us lives in the midst of God,

every one of us breathes in the breath of God,

every one of us is constantly touched by the exquisite artistry of God's creativity,
which is part of ordinary life.

We need only look.

Unfortunately we do not focus on God's presence all around us,

We are too caught up in the chaos that is around us.

And again, unfortunately this is not something new.

In ancient Israel the sea was a symbol of chaos.

This is why the disciples were afraid,

and why Jesus had to identify himself in the same way

that God identified himself to Moses—"I am" or "It is I."

For Jesus to calm the storm, it meant that he had power over the chaos that is all around us.

This is important to remember,

because we need to remember that Jesus has power over the chaos of COVID.

In the ancient Church, a boat was a symbol of the church--bouncing around on the chaos of the world.

When early Christians read this story,

they would have been reminded that Christ is with them...

in the midst of the persecutions that were happening all around them.

When we hear this story we are reminded, that in the midst of COVID,
Christ is all around us.

In the midst of the chaos all around us, we have moments of courage.

We see this courage in Peter, when he exclaims; “If it is you command me to come.”
Courageously, Peter accepts Jesus’ invitation to come, and he begins to walk on the water.
His faith upholds him.
However, his faith is not strong enough to overcome his fear of the chaotic waters,
and so he sinks.

In this story Peter is a model of: both faith, and lack of faith.

He believed he could walk on water...and he did...

He doubted that he would be able to withstand the chaos—and he did not.

Ultimately his faith won out, for Peter cried out to Jesus,
knowing that Jesus had the power to save him.

We are inheritors of Peter’s faith.

We are here because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God,
who has saved us from ourselves and our destruction.

But it also means in every storm that threatens our life,

Jesus calls us to faith, and saves us when we are drowning,
He accompanies us back to safety
and brings calm to the troubled seas of our life.

Although we inherit Peter’s faith that does not mean it will be easy.

At times we are all faced with a situation which will test our faith:

- 1) Promotion at work, if we agreed to do something unjust,
- 2) A missed opportunity to pray, if we go and visit friends,
- 3) An unexpected pregnancy which can be terminated with an abortion,
- 4) Turning away from someone who is hungry, because they don’t look “Safe,”
- 5) Even the threat of a small virus.

In these times, we need to become still enough to hear the voice of God,
and have the courage to listen to what the voice is telling us.

When we are faced with a difficult situation, the question becomes, what do we do?

In the first reading we saw what Elijah did when he was in a difficult situation,
He retreated into a cave;
and God had to call him from his place of shelter and darkness.

More often than not, God calls us out of our caves, from the places where we have retreated.

Which is why, when we are in a difficult situation, we need to spend time in prayer.
It is easy to pray when everything is going well,
it is much more difficult to pray in the midst of chaos.

In those moments of difficulty we need to remember what happened in the gospel...

Before Jesus even started walking on the water--Jesus went up the mountain to pray.

Through prayer, he is in the presence of God,

and through the presence of God he is able to be with his disciples.

We cannot forget this, because this parallels our present situation.

Right now Jesus is not physically present to us,
but through the power of God, he is present to us spiritually.

This is import to remember in moments of crises...crises like COVID 19.

In those difficult moments in life we need to listen to the voice of God,
as he tells us to leave the boat and start walking towards him.

And in those moments when we begin to falter, we need to keep focused on him.