

Anecdote: # 1: "No! Jesus who calmed the storm will save me!" The Mississippi River was flooding its banks, and the waters were rising swiftly around Dorothy's house. The waters had gotten to the level of the front porch where Dorothy was standing when a man in a rowboat came by and called to Dorothy, "Hop in and I'll take you to high ground." Dorothy replied, "No, Jesus who calmed the storm in the sea will save me from flood waters!" The river continued to rise to the second story windows and Dorothy, looking out, saw a powerboat come up. The man in the powerboat called to Dorothy, "Hop in and I'll take you to high ground." Dorothy replied, "No, my Jesus will save me!" The river had now risen to the roof of the house. Dorothy was sitting on the ridge at the top of the house with the waters swirling around her feet. She saw a helicopter fly over, and the people inside yelled over a bull horn, "Grab the rope and climb in, and we'll take you to high ground." Dorothy replied, "No, Jesus will save me!" The river continued to rise. Finally the floodwaters engulfed the house and Dorothy was drowned. The next thing Dorothy knew, she was standing before Jesus. In anger, she asked Jesus, "I put my trust in you. Why have you forsaken me?" And to her Jesus replied, "What do you want from me? I sent you a rowboat, a powerboat, and a helicopter!" (<http://www.inspiration.com>). Today's Gospel tells us that we have to act promptly, trusting in the power of Jesus and seeking his help as the apostles did.

2: The Edmund Fitzgerald buried in Lake Superior: In 1976, the songwriter Gordon Lightfoot recorded a haunting ballad in honor of, and as a tribute to, a ship and its crew members who lost their lives. He called it "*The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald.*" The *Edmund Fitzgerald* was a giant ore-freighter, 729 feet in length. It was the largest carrier on the Great Lakes from 1958 until 1971. The *Fitzgerald* was labeled "the pride of the American Flag." On November 10, 1975, the *Fitzgerald* was hauling a heavy load of ore to Detroit, Michigan, when it ran into a severe storm. This storm generated 27-30-foot waves. During the evening hours the ship disappeared from radar screens; apparently it sank in a matter of minutes. It now rests on the bottom of Lake Superior, broken in two with the bow upright and the stern upside down, still loaded with its cargo of ore and all 29 hands. Today's Gospel describes how Jesus saved his apostles from a possible wreck in the Sea of Galilee (Confer # 2, 3, & 4).

Introduction: The role of God in calming the storms of life is the central theme of the readings for this *Storm Sunday*. The first reading tells us how the Lord speaks to Job whose life was devastated by storms of illness, the deaths of his dear ones and the total loss of his possessions. "*Out of the storm,*" God reminds Job that He is in control. Today's Responsorial Psalm picks up the storm theme and tells us how the Lord saves the sailors caught up in the high waves of a tempest by "*hushing the storm to a gentle breeze.*" "*They who sailed the sea in ships ... saw the works of the Lord and His wonders in the abyss.*" The second reading explains that Jesus died for us to make us a "*new creation.*" In order to receive this gift, we have to respond to his love by living for him in all situations of our lives. In other words, Paul celebrates the saving significance of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection and of our participation in the mystery. Today's

Gospel describes how, by a commanding word, Jesus stilled a storm on the Sea of Galilee, returned the sea to its natural order and saved his followers from drowning. The incident reminds us to keep Jesus in our life's boat and to seek his help in the storms of life.

First reading: Job 38: 1, 8-11: The *Book of Job* was probably written by a Jewish sage sometime around the time of the Exile. It addresses the problem of human suffering but does not solve it. The book is a kind of folktale and the central character, Job, represents a good person who must deal with the agony of undeserved suffering. In this week's text, God addresses Job for the first time, questioning his right to challenge God's authority and leading Job deeper and deeper into the mystery of creation. God tells Job that He is the Creator and Lord of the sea and the waters, and only He can control the wind and the sea and the other elements. "*I set limits for the sea and fastened the bar of its door.*" *The Book of Job*, taken in its totality, teaches the lesson that God has plans and purposes which mortal men cannot grasp. It also states that, although the wicked prosper and the innocent suffer for a time, YAHWEH finally redresses the wrongs suffered by the innocent!

Second Reading, 2 Corinthians 5:14-17: Paul who "rode the storm" of rejection, from his former friends also experienced storms of violent hostility from the Jews who refused to believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Corinth, a Greek seaport, was a cosmopolitan place where multiple Greek philosophies and religions were current, and where seaport morals were common. Although some received the Gospel enthusiastically from Paul, a few of them were prone to be competitive and to judge each other harshly. Indeed some judged Paul himself harshly, particularly when he canceled a planned trip to Corinth in order to attend to matters he judged more pressing. Paul has already introduced his distinction between the flesh and the spirit. Here the flesh means not just the locus of sexual desires, but all the egoism and the egotistic tendencies which urge people live as if they do not need God. Paul believes Baptism changes all that. By Baptism, the formerly flesh-centered person has died to that way of life. This change in Christians changes their fundamental orientation, meaning that the baptized should no longer live for themselves, but for Christ. So they should no longer think of each other as competitors, but as co-members of a new creation. Hence, Paul insists that the Corinthians stop living just for themselves, stop judging each other "according to the flesh."

Exegesis: The objective: Mark's emphasis on Jesus' wondrous works helps him to reveal Jesus' true Messianic identity. Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus works miracles as a sign of his head-on engagement with the forces of sin and evil in this world. In the miracle stories, Jesus' unequivocal triumph over these forces verifies his true nature - that of God, His Father, as well as His true identity as the Messiah of God. The miracle of the stilling of the sea is described in Mark for the same purpose. By describing this miracle, Mark also assures the first-century believers that nothing can harm the Church as long as the risen Lord is with them. Mark's audience in Rome in the 60s A.D. surely felt that way as they faced persecution by the Emperor Nero during which both Peter and Paul

were probably martyred. Mark presents the person of Jesus as in control of the forces of chaos, and hence able to still the storms which threaten to overturn the community of the Church.

The context: Jesus concludes a long day of teaching the crowd by proposing that he and the disciples now cross over the Sea of Galilee to begin work on the opposite shore. In this week's text, the crossing of the stormy sea lies between Jesus' ministry in Galilee and his first experience among the Gentiles. The story thus occurs at a point of change and challenge in the mission of Jesus and his disciples.

The storm: The Sea of Galilee is a lake, more than six hundred feet below sea level. It is thirteen miles long from north to south and eight miles broad from east to west at its widest. It is notorious for its sudden squalls. On the west side there are hills with valleys and gullies, and rivers have cut deep ravines through the tablelands down into the sea. When a cold wind blows from the west, these valleys and gullies act like gigantic funnels. The wind becomes compressed in them, and it rushes down upon the lake with savage violence and with startling suddenness, causing violent and unexpected storms.

The reaction: Despite the fact that many of the disciples are themselves fishermen, and thus, presumably, are familiar with the turbulent moods of the lake, it is they who grow terrified and panicky while Jesus, the landsman, serenely sleeps in the stern. Unable to control their fears the disciples wake Jesus up, accusing him of disregarding their safety. Jesus' response is immediate. First, he attends to the physical danger confronting them. His words, "*Peace! Be still!*" are the same words he used to banish the demon he exorcised at the beginning of Mark's Gospel (1:25). The words are a command, demonstrating Jesus' power over destructive forces - forces within (1:21-28) and forces outside (4:35-41). Jesus' words here result in an instantaneous calm falling over the sea. This miracle proves that Jesus is master of the natural world, able to control the mysterious, previously untamable side of creation.

The lesson: Just as the disciples had accused Jesus of abandoning them during the tumult, Jesus now turns to his followers and scolds them for abandoning their faith in him and in their mission. Mark's miracle story asks us to consider two questions. First, who is Jesus? (v.41) Second, will you trust this Jesus? The disciples fail on both counts on this occasion. Even though they don't suspect Jesus' true identity, they accept Him with joy as their Master, but they are incapable of trusting in his love and care for them. Fear, doubt and insecurity overwhelm the disciples on this stormy voyage. Jesus stills the storm as if exorcising a demon in much the same way as he did in many of Mark's miracle stories. That is the whole point of the story: nothing could harm the disciples while he was with them. Many people have found great comfort in sensing Jesus' constant presence in the most difficult and dangerous crises.

The allegoric meaning: Many of the Fathers of the Church consider this miracle story as an allegory of the early Church. The boat in the stormy lake is a symbol of the Church facing challenges from inside and various forms of suppression and persecution from outside. The faithful in such situations wondered if Jesus had deserted his Church. But in

their desperate cry for help they were able to experience the inner peace and strength of Jesus. Very often the Church and the faithful have no control over the political and social developments of our society. But, no matter what we are experiencing, we can -- with the help of Jesus -- find peace. It is the peace which only He can give. And it is a peace which no person and nothing can take away from us.

Life messages: #1: We need to accommodate Jesus in the boat of our life. All of us are making a journey across the sea of time to the shore of eternity. Hence, it is natural that, occasionally, we all experience different types of violent storms in our lives: physical storms, emotional storms, and spiritual storms. We face storms of sorrow, doubt, anxiety, worry, temptation and passion. The storms we encounter in life are often what make us or break us. These storms can either bring us closer to God and one another or alienate us from God and others. And it is only Jesus who can still these storms for us. Jesus can give us real peace in the storm of sorrow. When we are totally depressed with sorrow Jesus assures us of the glory of the life to come. Jesus consoles us at the loss of our dear ones with the assurance of eternal life for them in the Heavenly home of God the Father where we, too, will live one day. When the storms of doubt seek to uproot the very foundations of our Faith, Jesus is there to still that storm, revealing to us his Divinity and the authority behind the words of the Holy Scripture. Jesus gives us peace in a tempest of doubt, tension and uncertainty, provided we humbly submit to Jesus' guidance. He gives us peace in the storms of anxiety and worry about ourselves, about the unknown future and about those we love. Jesus calms the storms of passion in people who have hot hearts and blazing tempers. Jesus is the captain of the boats of our souls. He won't stop all the storms of our souls, but he will see to it that we do not sink, if we keep our Faith and keep calling for his help.

2: "Lord, don't you care about us?" Sure, He does! Is Christ asleep? We might often be tempted to think so when we sit by, helplessly watching the sufferings of a loved one, or in the face of personal tragedy, or in times of depression or natural disaster. In such moments we instinctively turn to God and yet sometimes we don't find Him or He seems far away, apparently busy with other matters. But in our Gospel passage today, Jesus does calm the storm. And that's just it. Jesus does calm the storm -- not all storms forever, but each storm individually at the right moment, just when calming is needed. In AA (Alcoholics Anonymous, and in all the dependency groups based on the AA Model), there is a slogan which says "*Let Go - and Let God.*" It is a marvelously liberating thing to let go, and to let God -- to trust God to make things come out right instead of worrying about how we are going to make this happen ourselves, to decide to act in His will instead of worrying about how to do what we want to do, instead of trying to fix everything on our own.

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