

Synopsis of OT XIX (August 13) Sunday Homily on Mt 14: 22-33 (L-17)

Introduction: The readings for this week speak of God's saving presence among His people and the need for trusting Faith in our loving and providing God Who always keeps us company, and the need of prayer in storms of life.

Scripture lessons: The first reading tells us of how Elijah the prophet who had defeated the 450 false priests of Baal with the help of just such a trusting faith in the power of Yahweh (and then had fled for his life), encountered the Lord God for help and strength and on Mt Horeb. In the second reading, Paul laments and mourns over the Jews who, having lost their faith in Yahweh and His prophets, had rejected their promised Messiah, Jesus. Paul tells us later (11: 7-24), that God's plan called for the Jews to reject Jesus so that a few believers, like Paul, would be forced to carry the Good News outside Judaism and to evangelize the Gentiles. The Gospel episode occurred during an unexpected storm on the Sea of Galilee in the early morning hours. As Jesus approached the apostles, miraculously walking on water, he allayed their fears by telling them, "*It is I.*" The Gospel episode also explains how Peter lost his trusting faith in Jesus for a few seconds and consequently failed during his attempt to walk on water.

Life messages: 1) Call Jesus in the storms facing the Church and our lives. Let us approach Jesus with strong faith in his ability and availability to calm the storms in the life of the Church and in our lives. Church history shows us how Jesus saved his Church from the storms of persecution in the first three centuries, from the storms of heresies in the 5th and sixth centuries, from the storms of moral degradation and the Protestant reformation movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the storms of sex abuse scandals of the clergy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is the presence of Jesus which gives us peace even in the wildest storms of life: storms of sorrow, storms of doubt, tension and uncertainty, storms of anxiety and worries, storms of anger and despair, storms of temptations and storms in family relationship. But this demands a personal relationship with God, with Jesus, enhanced through prayer, meditative reading of Scripture and active participation in the Holy Mass.

2) We need to imitate the short prayer of sinking Peter: We are expected to pray to God every day with trusting faith for strengthening our personal relationship with Him and for acknowledging our dependence on Him. But when we have no time or mental energy for formal prayers, let us use the short prayers in the gospels like Peter's prayer: "*Lord, save me,*" or the prayer of the mother of the possessed girl: "*Lord, help me,*" or the blind man's prayer: "*Son of David, have mercy on me,*" or the sinner's prayer: "*Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.*" We get plenty of time during our travels to say the short prayers like the "Our Father", "Hail Mary" and "Glory be to." We may begin every day offering all our day's activities to God and asking for His grace to do His will and conclude every day before we go to sleep, by asking God's pardon and forgiveness for our sins. Keeping a Bible on our table will encourage us to read at least a few words of the Bible and thus listen to what God is telling us to do.

OT XIX [A] (August 10) 1 Kg 19:9, 11-13; Rom 9:1-5; Matt 14:22-33

Anecdote # 1: An old story about trustful faith: In the middle of a dark winter's night in a small Midwest farming community, the two-story home of a young family caught fire. Quickly, parents and children followed their well-practiced emergency plan and made their way through the smoke-filled home out into the front yard. There the father quickly counted heads and realized that their 5-year-old son was not among them. Suddenly he heard a wail and looked up to see the boy at his bedroom window, crying and rubbing his eyes. Knowing the danger of reentering the house to rescue his son, the father called, "Jump, Son! I'll catch you!" Between sobs, the boy responded to the voice he knew so well. "But, I can't see you, Daddy!" The father answered with great assurance. "No, Son, you can't see me, but I can see you! Jump!" At that, the boy jumped into the smoky darkness and found himself safely cradled in his father's arms. Our scripture today is about trusting – about having faith – about being able to discern the fact that our God is always with us, even in storms of life.

2: Elizabeth Blackwell walked on water: For Elizabeth Blackwell "walking on water" meant something entirely different. Elizabeth Blackwell was born on February 3, 1821, in Bristol, England. As a girl, she moved with her family to the United States, where she first worked as a teacher. Elizabeth wanted to become a doctor in the 1840s. At the time, medical schools were only for men. Elizabeth Blackwell had to fight just to get in. Finally, at one school, Geneva College of Medicine in New York, the students voted to let her in as a joke. But the head of the school didn't know it was supposed to be a joke, and he let her in. When she got there, the students made fun of her. They refused to share their notes with her. Some professors tried to keep her out of their classes. She refused to give up. In 1849, she graduated at the head of her class. When no hospital would allow her to practice, she opened her own hospital. Then she opened a medical school to train women. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Blackwell) Elizabeth Blackwell courageously got out of the boat and walked on the roaring waters of opposition and gender discrimination in the medical profession. Today's gospel tells us how Peter the apostle tried to walk on water and failed because of his weak faith in Jesus.

3: Called or Not, God is Present. Above the office door of the Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung (1875-1961), hung a stone plaque inscribed with the words: Called or Not, God is Present. Jung's sign encapsulated in a few words what the joint testaments of Judaism and Christianity have put forth in hundreds of thousands of words for centuries, viz., that the transcendent almighty God chooses to be with humankind, to commune with us, to love and move among us, to be near, to abide, to be present whether called or not, in peace, as well as in panic. God's presence is a dynamic divine presence, ever communing, ever revealing, ever abiding, ever calling, ever drawing near. This Sunday's first reading relates the experience of the prophet Elijah who sought and realized the presence of God in the peaceful silence of Horeb (Sinai). Peter and the

disciples (gospel) experienced the presence of God in the person of Jesus whose power over the sea calmed their panic and fostered their faith. Paul, in the second reading from Romans, lamented the fact that not all of his fellow Israelites had come to know the saving presence of God as he had, on the road to Damascus. (Patricia Datchuck Sánchez)

4: There seems to be no limit to our fears. In a *Peanuts* cartoon strip Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for a nickels worth of psychiatric help. She proceeds to pinpoint his particular fear. "Perhaps," she says, "you have hypengyophobia," (the fear of responsibility). Charlie Brown says, "No." "Well, perhaps you have ailurophobia," (the fear of cats). "No." "Well, maybe you have climacophobia," (the fear of staircases). "No." Exasperated, Lucy says, "Well, maybe you have pantophobia," (the fear of everything). "Yes," says Charlie, "that's the one!" Sometimes we feel we are afraid of everything. We are tossed by storms of fear. We are afraid of ourselves. We are afraid of people. We are afraid of the future. We are afraid of the past. We are afraid of life. We are afraid of death. Peter knows that the Lord can sustain him. Even in the midst of the storm, when there is nothing but uncertainty, He will take care of us. But I want you to know that faith is a risk-taking enterprise.

Introduction: The readings for this week speak of God's saving presence for His people and the need for trusting faith in a loving and providing God Who always keeps us company. The first reading tells us of how Elijah the prophet who had defeated the 450 false priests of Baal with the help of just such a trusting faith in the power of Yahweh (and then had fled for his life), encountered the Lord God on Horeb. In the second reading, Paul laments and mourns over the Jews who, having lost their faith in Yahweh and His prophets, had rejected their promised Messiah, Jesus. The Gospel episode explains how Peter lost his trusting faith in Jesus for a few seconds and consequently failed during his attempt to walk on water.

The first reading: After Solomon's death (922 BC), the northern tribes broke away from Judah, from its priests and from the Temple in Jerusalem. They formed an independent country they called Israel, centered in the city of Samaria. As years rolled by, many of these Jews lost their faith in Yahweh. Their seventh king Ahab (869-850 BC) married Jezebel, the daughter of the pagan king of Tyre. He allowed her to build a temple for her god Baal, then encouraged, and himself took part in, idol-worship and immorality. The prophet Elijah was sent by Yahweh to Israel to bring His people back to true worship. Elijah's trusting faith in the power and presence of Yahweh enabled him to defeat and execute the 450 pagan priests of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18: 16-40). Consequently, Queen Jezebel sent murderous henchmen after the prophet. Elijah, sustained by food provided by God through an angel, fled for forty days and nights. He finally reached Horeb, the mountain where God had earlier established His covenant with Israel under Moses. Elijah might have expected a spectacular miracle from God to protect and vindicate him, or an appearance of God with great power in thunder and lightning to bolster his faith, like the one Moses had been granted on that very spot

(Exodus 19:16-19). However, the presence of God was not in the spectacles of thunder, earthquake or fire but in "*a tiny whispering sound.*" Elijah acknowledged God's presence by covering his face and coming out of the cave where he had taken shelter. He was content with God's quiet sign of His presence, and was consoled, trusting that his God was helping and protecting him. Just like Elijah, we can miss God's presence by limiting our experience of Him to certain places and persons and forgetting that He is everywhere. The first reading reminds us that we have to experience God's presence in our lives and listen carefully to everything going on around us, because we encounter God in insignificant as well as spectacular events. Failure, as well as success, offers us the opportunity for growth in trusting faith in a loving and providing God.

The second reading: In the first eight chapters of his letter to the Romans, Paul describes the blessings which Christ the Messiah, as the fulfillment of "the Law and the prophets," brought to mankind. Deeply moved, Paul (in today's second reading), cries out in passionate grief for his countrymen, the Jews, because as a nation they have refused to see Christ as the Messiah promised to them by God through their patriarchs and prophets and thus have forfeited their status as God's chosen people. Paul tells us later (11: 7-24), that God's plan called for the Jews to reject Jesus so that a few believers, like Paul, would be forced to carry the Good News outside Judaism and to evangelize the Gentiles. The result would be the salvation of the whole world and the reconciliation of the Jews and the Gentiles - blessings even greater than the election of Israel. Thus, the ancient promise of God to Abraham would not go unfulfilled. Our first reaction should be a fervent "Thank You, God," for the true Faith we have received and embraced. Our second thought should be to ask the good God, with trusting Faith, to send the light of Faith to the descendants of Abraham, and to re-light it among those Gentiles who have extinguished it. It is not enough for a true Christian that he should live his own life according to the laws of Christ. True charity demands that he be seriously interested in the spiritual welfare of his neighbors.

Exegesis: The context: Today's lesson, the account of Jesus' walking on the Sea of Galilee, is one of the best-known passages in the New Testament. It forms a narrative bridge between the Jewish and Gentile portions of Jesus' ministry, as well as giving us a theologically rich story about Jesus in its own right. In Matthew's Gospel, the story follows the rejection of Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth (13:54-58), the death of John the Baptist (14:1-12), and the feeding of the five thousand (14:13-21). It precedes the account of his healing of the sick at Gennesaret (14:34-36) and his confrontation with the Jewish authorities over the nature of tradition (15:1-9). In addition to being a collection of miracle stories (feeding, walking, healing), the stories also form a complex of narratives which, when taken together, speak about both those who recognized in Jesus the One promised by Israel's religious tradition and those whose doubts or vested interests had blinded them to the miraculous power in their midst. "In Matthew's inspired theology, the divine presence in human history unfolds in three stages: (1) God forms the people of Israel and remains with them in good times and bad; (2) in fulfillment of divine promise through the prophets, Jesus, Messiah and incarnate Son of God, is present among his people as their savior; (3) in these last days, the Risen Lord,

through his disciples, is present to extend his saving mission beyond his particular historical time and land to all nations." The one constant in the drama of the divine presence in history is the necessity of human response to the saving presence with total trust. (Campion P. Gavalier, O.S.B.)

The challenge of trusting faith: Jesus' walking on the water follows the miraculous feeding in Matthew, Mark, and John. However, the account of Peter's walking on the water is found only in Matthew. Thus, Matthew's retelling of this event also says something about Peter and his faith. While we might emphasize Peter's fear, his sinking and his "little" Faith, we need to look also at his leap of Faith. Peter represents all who dare to believe that Jesus is Savior, take their first steps in confidence that Jesus is able to sustain them, and then forget to keep their gaze fixed on him when they face storms of temptations. From the depth of crisis, however, they remember to call on the Savior, and they experience the total sufficiency of his grace to meet their needs. It is this type of "little Faith" of Peter which Jesus later identifies as the rock on which he will build his Church. The only Faith Jesus expects of his followers is a Faith which concentrates solely on him. In other words, when we simply heed Our Lord, we can do great things. So, with His grace, we have to raise our awareness of God's presence in our lives. As we become more aware, we will step out and proclaim that presence, even in surprising places.

Assertion of Christ's Divinity: Since there are number of passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that speak of God walking on the sea (e.g., Job 9:8; Hab. 3:15; Ps. 77:19), it has been argued that this is a theophany: Jesus revealing himself to his disciples as God by proving his mastery over the sea, considered by the ancients to be an unruly chaos inhabited by evil spirits. In Jewish folklore, only God could walk on the water, but human beings cannot see God and live. Therefore, if a person thinks he sees someone walking on the water, it must be a ghost! And the way to get rid of ghosts is to shout and scream. This is exactly what the disciples did until Jesus told them, "Take courage; it is I." Then those in the boat worshipped Jesus and proclaimed him to be truly the Son of God. There are aspects of this story that suggest a post-Easter event described in John 21:1-14, where the risen Jesus is at first unrecognized. Then, when the disciples know who he is, Peter jumps out of the boat and swims to Jesus. When the disciples get to shore, Jesus takes bread and fish – the same elements that appear in the feeding story before our text (vv. 13-21) – and gives them a meal. The only other occurrence of the disciples' worshipping Jesus takes place on the mountain after the resurrection (28:17).

Assurance of hope in the midst of persecutions: "*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.*" Matthew recorded his Gospel after Peter was crucified, when the Christians were being persecuted. The two storm stories address issues of danger, fear and Faith. In both stories, the boat seems to represent the Church, buffeted by temptations, trials and persecutions. In both, Jesus appears as the Church's champion, strong to save those who call on him in faith. The recounting of this episode probably brought great comfort to the early Christians, especially those of Matthew's faith community. For it offered them the assurance that Christ would save them even if they had to die for their faith in him, and that, even in the midst of persecution, they need not fear because Jesus

was present with them. The episode offers the same reassurance to us in times of illness, death, persecution, or other troubles. It teaches us that adversity is not a sign of God's displeasure, nor prosperity a sign of His pleasure, that illness is not a sign of inadequate Faith, nor health a sign of great Faith. Paradoxically, the storms of life can be a means of blessing. When things are going badly, our hearts are more receptive to Jesus. A broken heart is often a door through which Christ can find entry. He still comes to us in the midst of our troubles, saying, "*Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.*"

Life messages: 1) Call Jesus in the storms facing the Church and our lives. Let us approach Jesus with strong faith in his ability and availability to calm the storms in the life of the Church and in our lives. Church history shows us how Jesus saved his Church from the storms of persecution in the first three centuries, from the storms of heresies in the 5th and sixth centuries, from the storms of moral degradation and the Protestant reformation movement in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the storms of sex abuse scandals of the clergy in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is the presence of Jesus which gives us peace even in the wildest storms of life: storms of sorrow, storms of doubt, tension and uncertainty, storms of anxiety and worries, storms of anger and despair, storms of temptations. Storms reveal to us our inability to save ourselves and point us to the infinite ability of God to save us. When Jesus shows up in our life's storms, we find that we gain strength to do the seemingly impossible. For example, when Jesus shows up he makes marriages out of mistakes, he invigorates, restores, and empowers us to reach the unreachable, to cross the un-crossable. Storms let us know that without him we can do nothing, without him we are doomed to fail. Yet, when Jesus shows up, we gain the strength to join Paul, saying, "*In Christ I can do all things.*" But this demands a personal relationship with God, with Jesus, enhanced through prayer, meditative study of Scripture and active Sacramental life. Experiencing Jesus' presence in our lives, let us confess our faith in him and call out for his help and protection.

2) We need to imitate the short prayer of sinking Peter: We are expected to pray to God every day with trusting faith for strengthening our personal relationship with Him and for acknowledging our dependence on Him. But when we have no time or mental energy for formal prayers, let us use the short prayers in the gospels like Peter's prayer: "*Lord, save me,*" or the prayer of the mother of the possessed girl: "*Lord, help me,*" or the blind man's prayer: "*Son of David, have mercy on me,*" or the sinner's prayer: "*Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.*" We get plenty of time during our travels to say the short prayers like the "Our Father", "Hail Mary" and "Glory be to." We may begin every day offering all our day's activities to God and asking for His grace to do His will and conclude every day before we go to sleep, by asking God's pardon and forgiveness for our sins. Keeping a Bible on our table will encourage us to read at least a few words of the Bible and thus listen to what God is saying to us.

3) We should not limit God's saving presence: There are those who would limit God's presence for their own comfort or security or to keep themselves in power. In years past there were those who would deny God's presence in slaves. There have been those who would ignore God's presence in their enemies. There are those who would refuse to believe that God is present in the murderer sitting on death row, in those who are marginalized by our society: the gay person, the addict, the person living with AIDS, the illegal alien, the handicapped. It is in situations like these that we have to get out of the boat, surprise others and show them the reflection of God in such people. Let us always look for the ways to be surprised by our God and the opportunities to wake one another up to the beauty, the power and the nearness of our loving, providing and protecting God.

JOKE OF THE WEEK

1: Familiar story. In one of his books, Mark Twain recalls a visit to the Holy Land and a stay in Capernaum. It was a moonlit night, so he decided to take his wife on a romantic boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Twain asked a man in a rowboat how much he would charge to take them out on the water. The man saw Twain's white suit, white shoes and white hat and supposed he was a rich Texan. So he said the cost would be twenty-five dollars. Twain walked away as he said, "Now I know why Jesus walked on water."

2) Ministers walking on water! There is the story about three clergymen: a Jewish Rabbi, a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest. They were fishing together. They rowed to the middle of a small lake and cast their lines. Soon they ran out of bait. The rabbi volunteered to go for more. Calmly he stepped off the boat and walked across the water to the shore. When he returned in the same manner, it was discovered that the trio's canteens were empty. Immediately the minister collected them and, like the rabbi, walked across the water to the shore and filled them up and returned. Later, when the men grew hungry, they realized they had forgotten a lunch basket, whereupon the priest quickly rose, stepped off the boat and immediately plunged to the bottom of the lake. When he had surfaced, he heard the rabbi say to the minister, "I suppose we really should have told him where the stones are."

3) Have Faith my child": For the umpteenth time Mrs. Youngston came to her pastor to tell him, "I'm so scared! Joe says he's going to kill me if I continue to come to your church." "Yes, yes, my child," replied the pastor, more than a little tired of hearing this over and over. "I will continue to pray for you, Mrs. Youngston. Have faith - the Lord will watch over you." "Oh yes, He has kept me safe thus far, only....." "Only what, my child?" "Well, now Joe says if I keep coming to your church, he's going to kill YOU!" "Well, now," said the pastor, "Perhaps it's time for me to check out that little parish on the other side of town."

4) A priest of little faith and big ambitions: A Jewish rabbi and his friend a Catholic priest were traveling together in a train and it being a long journey they started to talk. Rabbi : So what's your next move, padre?

Priest : Well, if I'm lucky I might get a parish of my own

Rabbi : And then?

Priest : Well perhaps I'll be made a Monsignor and maybe even a Bishop!

Rabbi : And after that?

Priest : Well I suppose, it's just possible that I could become a Cardinal

Rabbi : Yes, and what after that?

Priest : Well, it's ridiculous to think about it. But I suppose I could become Pope!

Rabbi : And then?

Priest : Well that's it, Pope! There's only God after that.

Rabbi : Well, you never know, after all one of our Jewish boys from Nazareth, made it!

(Source: Jewish Jokes "with no blasphemy intended")