

Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary time June 21, 2015

Readings Job 38:1, 8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41

Everyone in this world is anxious or fearful about something. It ties in with stress and worry. Today many people around us are facing tough economic times including loss of jobs, loss of homes and nowhere to turn. When we experience fear or anxiety in our lives we tend underestimate God's power and what He can do for us. We trust a great deal on ourselves and ignore God's presence. Often we feel the situation in which we find ourselves in is too big for God. We must remember that God created the storms and everything else in nature. No matter how doubtful we may feel he is still in complete control over everything. Understanding God means that he can calm the storms in our lives if we will only have a little faith. We may not go through the physical storm as the disciples did. But we all have been through many other storms in our own lives like sickness, loosing job, failures, personal weakness, death of loved one, accident, depression, hopelessness etc., where we feel helpless. We may think or feel like God does not care. He seems to be sleeping and is not answering our prayers. Jesus is a teacher, leader, speaker or great man. But it is when we realize his true identity, we can entrust him our whole life. We may have been through many storms in our personal walk with Jesus, and have seen his faithfulness and power at work in due time. We have to learn not to doubt, but to completely trust him.

During his public ministry the whole aim of Jesus was to show to his disciples and the people who he was and that he had been sent to bring them to God. When he fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, when he walked on the water, when he healed the cripple with a word or permitting the woman simply to touch him, he was showing himself to be the Lord, the one God, walking in their midst as a man. If the Apostles were slow to catch on we should be grateful for the mirror they hold up to us. We cling to the material world whose comforting solidity directly under our feet seems far more real than the promises of the Spirit. What is the eternal measured against the here and now? What is faith in God compared to these gigantic waves breaking into the tiny boat? Are these waves the truth, or is it the sleeping Jesus in the stern? So Jesus rebukes the waves and then he rebukes his anxious disciples. Quiet now! Be calm! The command could be equally applied to his companions in the boat but Jesus speaks it to the turbulent sea. To his Apostles he asks a question which should resonate in each one of us present here today because it is actually addressed to each one of us: Why are you so frightened? Should we not be aware of the presence of Jesus close to us and he is ready to protect us.

This theme of Divine power is manifested in the first reading of today from the book of Job. All the Israelites were fully aware that it is only God who has the total control over all the elements of the universe. The book of Job raises several questions concerning the problem of evil in the world. We are often concerned of the suffering of the innocent in the world. Why little children die of cancer or other incurable diseases. Job, the innocent person, suffers and is accused of guilt by his own friends, and yet remains content with his total trust in God. God proclaims his superiority over the seas and all powers and the final victory belongs to God. Then Job has no reason whatsoever to experience doubts. At the same time God indicates to Job that he is in full control of creation. He explains to him of the origin of the earth, the seas and the light. He tells him of his sovereignty and Job has no doubts. He tells him of the nature and consequently, God reveals himself to Job and Job to himself." As human beings it is easy to make false assumptions. We easily judge God as we frequently tend to judge others human persons, without knowing all the particulars of a situation. St Paul

tells us that man's wisdom is equal to God's foolishness. Man's faith should be in God and in the Divine Providence that never fails.

In today's Second Reading taken from the Second Letter to the Corinthians Paul urges the converts not to forget what it means to be a Christian. They have been given a new mode of life and are called to live for Christ who died and rose from the dead for them. He convinces them that there is no greater love than the love of one who dies for someone else. Jesus himself told of such love in his Final Discourse as given in the Gospel of John. The love of Christ is shown above all to us that he died on the cross for us. Christ made the ultimate sacrifice, giving his precious life for each and every one of us so that we may live. Paul was deeply moved by this love of Christ. This special love kept Paul from living for him. It led him to do great things for Christ and his people. Here we may ask what the love of Christ is. Is it the love Christ has for us or the love that we have for him? That answer is found in the actions of Saint Paul. The love that Jesus had for Paul is what made the apostle serve in such tireless and unselfish way. The only reason that we love Jesus is that he first loved us. It is the love of Christ that moves us to keep going in the service of God. Christ does not love us just for the sake of loving us. He suffered and died for us because we are his own, made in his own image and likeness. Our life has to be regularized by his love.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus leads us through a process by which we come to know the real identity of Jesus as it is gradually revealed. Jesus had spent his day preaching and healing the sick in Capernaum where great crowds had gathered. The crowds frequently gather around Jesus but they are not really numbered among his followers. They listen to him, they marvel at his miracles but they are at the most only potential followers. They were never really with him. Many had come out of curiosity to see him work miracles. Few others had the idea of a political messiah who would free them from Roman rule. Jesus quietly sent the crowds away and told his disciples to cross over in a boat to the opposite shore of the Lake of Galilee. They got into the boat and, we are told, there were some other boats accompanying them. As they are rowing through the lake, a storm suddenly came up. Generally, Lake of Galilee is known for its notorious and sudden storms. Large waves were breaking over the boat and filling it with water. The disciples were all frightened and thought their boat was going to sink. Jesus who was travelling with them was fast asleep at the back of the boat, on a cushion, apparently unaware of their situation. He would have been tired after a day's heavy work. The disciples were desperate and, they woke him up: "Master, do you not care? We are going down!" Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and spoke to the sea: "Quiet now! Be calm!" and all was quiet. The wind dropped and all was perfectly calm again. Then he told the disciples, where is your faith? Was there a reason to be scared when he was present with them? Indeed their admiration for him increased. Even the nature and sea obey him, they said. We see Jesus now as the master of the universe with total control over all creation.

The Gospel tells us that they all rejoiced because of the calm and he led them safely to the shore. He indeed was their savior and they knew very well that they could rely on him in their troubles and in their difficulties. Hence Peter could so easily say when all had deserted Jesus: "Lord to whom we shall go. You have the words of eternal life." Jesus shows this to us to indicate how powerful his kingdom is and he is in total control over every situation. Perhaps a deeper teaching is given to us today as it was given to the early church. We can read the story as a kind of parable or allegory of the Church and especially concerned the early Church as it is of the Church in many places in our own time. We can see the boat, here and in other parts of the Gospel, as symbolizing the Church. And in fact, as already mentioned

there were a number of boats, representing the different church communities. The early church was rocked with many persecutions that resembled the storm. Similarly today each one has to deal with its problems in its own way. All are struggling being caught in the rough sea and finding difficult to escape the storm. In one boat were the disciples of Jesus and Jesus was with them. The stormy water all around them symbolized trouble and persecution. The early Church then was like a small, fragile boat in a huge and often hostile ocean. Sometimes storms break out and threaten the boat-Church. The History tells us of the early persecutions as several enemies of the church and movements were determined to wipe it out. Yet the presence of Jesus and his closeness to the church protected them all. Maybe we see some threats looming on our horizon. We badly need the peace of Jesus. Very often we have no control over the political and social developments of our society; we have little or no control over what other people are doing. It is the peace which only he can give. And it is a peace which no person and nothing can take away from us.

Many Christians today demand that in such difficult confused and frightening situations where to find the presence of Jesus. It looks as if he is not close by, fast asleep or far away and does not really care of the struggle of his people. It is there the people cry out to say, Lord don't you care? We are drowning. The storms have taken control over us and the enemy is torturing us. Jesus now comes and says I am there with you and he will calm the storm in the life of the church community. The early church in their prayers realized that Jesus was still with them and they began to experience an inner peace. They came to realize that the storm was not in the sea but in their own fears and anxieties. The peace they would receive too was in their own hearts. The world around them was still the same and had not changed; it continued to persecute and oppress them. Yet the faith of the Christians was strong that Jesus was still with them. This is true in our times particularly in India when the Christian community is facing similar storms. Very often we have no control over the political and social developments of our society; we have little or no control over what other people are doing. This was the faith experience that made them steadfast in their fidelity to Christ and the Church has experienced the growth.

When Jesus calmed the storm, the disciples were stunned by the miracle of calming the storm. By this time they personally knew who Jesus was, and were aware of his divine power as they were quite impressed by his power of controlling the elements. This miracle on the one hand revealed the humanity or concern of Jesus and on the other the divinity or his miracle of control over the storm. When Jesus was sleeping in the stern of the boat, the disciples witnessed how humanly speaking he was tired and exhausted. When Jesus spoke to the sea and calmed the storm that showed his divine nature. We all have the experiences in our life when there has been a storm and we all wondered if Jesus is sleeping, if he truly hears our prayers, if he actually cares about our welfare. This is because we think in human way as we are weak and lack in faith we easily cry that the Lord has left us alone. We complain that the Lord is not paying attention to our prayers, our pleas, and our cries. But we know for sure he is close to us and will protect and guide us. We see in the Gospel, Jesus giving the disciples an immediate miraculous relief. We can ask why Jesus does not give us similar relief and more so why does he send the storm on to us. We have no answer to this question. Perhaps only in the heavenly bliss we will have the full answer to it. Only our faith and hope leads us to God and keeps us closer to him. There may be at times a prolonged lonely time placed on to us and we still wonder why. Perhaps Jesus understood this fully when he said on the cross: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" The answer to him was the silence of the Father, yet Jesus keeps his trust in the Father and the love of the Father prevails.

There is one important lesson for each one of us in today's gospel story. Our lives are indeed a journey across the sea of time to the shore of eternity. During that crossing all who come to the use of reason encounter some storms. There is no smooth and calm crossing for anyone. This is the will of God. Jesus in his life too had to face the storms in his life. On that night Jesus was aware of the coming of the storm and allowed the disciples to face it and only in their struggle he went to their aid. Throughout the past twenty centuries the church has faced the storms and always has found Jesus to give peace tranquility and safety. Jesus has given us the promise that he will be with us till the end of times taking care of us and protecting us from the storm. Therefore we must not expect to get from life what it cannot give. Instead we must use what it gives us, pleasant and unpleasant, light and darkness. Our struggles and subsequent peace will help us to fulfill our goal to discover Christ in our lives.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the sea shore with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life. This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it: "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me." The LORD replied: "My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you in my arms."

Fr Eugene Lobo S.J., Bangalore, India