

Homily for the 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B

June 23, 2024

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Job 38:1, 8-11 (God's mastery over the sea.)

Responsory: Psalm 107 (Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.)

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 (Whoever is in Christ is a new creation.)

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus calms the wind and the sea.)

For ancient peoples, the sea possessed a supernatural and terrifying quality. It was a place of great mystery and danger. In the popular imagination, the sea was the abode of monsters and demons. In the Old Testament, it represents primordial chaos and evil. It's a place where humans dare not go, but where *God* demonstrates his great power and absolute sovereignty over Creation.

We see this very clearly in today's first reading, from the Book of Job. After Job has the audacity to question God's justice, God appeals to his mastery over the sea in order to remind this mere human being of just how puny and insignificant he is in comparison to the Almighty God. God asks Job, "Who shut within doors the sea, when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and thick darkness its swaddling bands? When I set limits for it and fastened the bar of its door, and said: Thus far shall you come but no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!" What could any human being say in response, except, "You're right, O Lord, I'm sorry"?

Today's Responsorial Psalm also contrasts God's absolute power over the wind and the sea with man's utter helplessness before such forces of nature. But the Psalmist makes his point in a more positive way. He recalls the experience of sailors who were caught up in a dangerous storm, with wind and waves tossing them about. When they cried out to God in their distress, the Lord effortlessly rescued them and brought them home safely. God simply "hushed the storm to a gentle breeze, and the billows of the sea were stilled," just as Jesus calmed the wind and the sea in today's gospel with a simple command.

From the disciples' reaction, it appears that they did not know that Jesus possessed such power within himself. When they appealed to him for help, they probably expected him to pray to God for deliverance, like Moses in the Old Testament. They hoped that God would listen to Jesus because of his righteousness. But, Jesus did not raise up his hands in supplication and offer a prayer to the Almighty God, who *alone* has dominion over the wind and the sea. Instead, he just stood up in the boat and rebuked them himself, saying, "Quiet! Be still!" Immediately, the wind ceased, and the sea became calm, as if they were obeying the voice of God Almighty — which, of course, *they were*. The disciples rightly ask, "*Who is this* whom even the wind and sea obey?" They have just witnessed an epiphany. Jesus has shown them who he really is — not just God's faithful *servant*, but *God in the flesh*.

Had the disciples understood this when the squall came up and began to swamp the boat, they might not have panicked in the first place. That's why Jesus asks them after the fact, "Why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?" He means faith in *him*, their companion in the

boat, not just faith in the unseen God, who was known to possess power over the wind and sea. Jesus is suggesting that they need not panic as long as he's with them. They can have the same serenity that Jesus showed as he slept peacefully in the stern of the boat. In the Old Testament, untroubled sleep is a metaphor for trust in God's protection. Here, Jesus is perfectly calm in the midst of the storm, for he knows that there is no need for concern as long as he is present. Once calm has been restored, Jesus challenges his disciples to find that same faith within themselves, so that they might *remain* at peace when future crises arise. That same invitation to faith also extends to us, of course. The storm at sea serves as a perfect metaphor for *any situation* in which we feel helpless and fearful and need to turn to the Lord to ask for his peace.

One small detail in the gospel story hints at a potential obstacle to that peace, however. Notice what the disciples say to Jesus as they wake him up: "Teacher, *do you not care* that we are perishing?" They misinterpret Jesus' serenity as *indifference*. They should be looking to Jesus as their *example*, saying to themselves, "Look, he's sleeping peacefully; maybe we should calm down, too." Instead, they accuse Jesus of *not caring about them*. How often have we hurled that accusation at God when we really wanted him to do something for us and he seemed indifferent to our prayers? Faith is what reassures us of God's love and concern. It moves us to trust in the Lord, even when he *doesn't* jump at our every command and answer our prayers immediately. While we can and should plead with Jesus in times of distress, to rebuke the wind and the sea and restore our sense of calm, there is another option. We can also pray for *peace* in the Lord's presence, *even as our storm rages on*.

I'm not suggesting that we should sit by idly and do nothing in the midst of a crisis. Those disciples needed to keep bailing water out of the boat, or else they might have capsized and drowned before Jesus woke up! But Jesus tells them that there was no need to be *terrified* as they acted responsibly and intelligently to mitigate the danger. They should have managed the crisis *and* called on Jesus to help them. That's what we need to do, as well. When we face difficult challenges which are beyond our control, there are usually a number of things that we can do to make a good outcome more likely, but *worry* is not among them. Worry and panic do *not* make a crisis any more manageable, but *faith does*. In those moments, when we might be prone to panic, it might help to reflect on the image of Jesus asleep in the stern of the boat. We might ask ourselves, "Could he give *me* that deep sense of calm in the midst of *my* storm, if I ask him?" Jesus clearly implies that there was *never* a need for his disciples to be terrified. Faith in him could have cast out all their fear and replaced it with peace and serenity. So, perhaps the best course of action in such trials is to try our best to discern God's will, then cooperate to the best of our ability, *and* ask the Lord to take care of us. Hopefully, in the midst of our storm, we will hear the Lord reply to us in a serious but loving voice: "Do not be afraid; have faith in me. I'm right here in the boat with you."