

13 August 2017 (19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A)

1Kings 19:9,11-13; Psalm 84(85):9-14; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33.

Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.

Who is Jesus and what is my relationship with him? Similar to last week's gospel narrative about the transfiguration of Jesus, where he is revealed to the apostles as being Son of God and himself God, today we see the Church looking at Jesus and understanding that he is God. At the heart of today's narrative is Jesus' statement: I AM (it is I).

The gospel narrative is mirrored by a reading from the first book of Kings. On the holy mountain the prophet Elijah stands in the presence of God. Elijah does not experience God in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in the stillness (sound of a gentle breeze). Where do I experience God in my life today?

In the gospel, the boat carrying the apostles represents the Church in the time of Matthew and in our own times. The community around Matthew at times felt abandoned, facing the strong head winds on their own. This must have been a very distressing experience. At times we too may feel that our Church is facing very strong head winds on our own and perhaps wonder whether we have been abandoned. How do we face this situation?

Even if Jesus does not seem to be on the boat with the apostles, he is never far away and he can quickly reach the embattled boat. In the Old Testament there are a number of references that speak about God who is able to walk on water. In the book of Exodus, with God's power Moses led his people across the Red sea on dry land as it parted in front of them. Jesus does not need to part the water; he can actually walk on it because he is God. In scriptural language the water represents the power of the evil one who is constantly threatening the Church; Jesus is stronger than the evil one!

If I as an individual and as a member of the bigger Church keep focused on Jesus, then I do not need to be afraid. Even if the winds feel very strong and the time of trouble seems to be long (Jesus approaches the boat in the early morning, implying that the disciples had been struggling on the sea for a long time) I still need to believe that Jesus is not far: courage it is I, do not be afraid!

Peter asks Jesus to invite him to walk on water. I do share in the life of God and with God's help I too, like Peter, can walk on water. Is my faith strong enough to believe that I can walk on water with Jesus? Even though Peter is out on the water walking towards Jesus, he can still feel the strong winds threatening him; even though we try our very best to follow Jesus in our daily life, the troubles do not go away. Only faith can help us move forward.

Peter does the mistake of taking his eyes off Jesus and concentrates rather on the strong wind blowing around him. As an individual and as a member of the Church I need to keep reminding myself that I will never be able to survive on my own. The troubles I face in my daily life, the difficulties the Church faces today are far bigger than what any human can handle on their own. Yet Jesus invites us to keep focused on him alone. He is the one who can calm my storm when the time comes. My job is to have faith and to keep on trusting in God. Together with God I can survive and as a member of the Church I am invited to put my trust in God alone.

The invitation is to recognise Jesus as God and to have faith in him.

Fr Mario