

19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR A – 2020

1 Kings 19:9, 11-13 Romans 9:1-5 Matthew 14:22-33

Reflection

Fr Tao Pham

As the disciples struggle against strong headwinds, they see Jesus walking on the water and fear he is a ghost. Matthew adds the details about Peter's request to come across the water to Jesus. Jesus shows his power over the elements of nature by walking on the water, and he shows he can share this power with others such as Peter. The people of Jesus' day believed that the sea symbolized chaos and evil. Jesus' power over the sea is presented not only as Divine power over the elements but also as power over evil in the world.

Peter comes walking to Jesus on the water. Like later in his life, as long as he keeps his eyes on Jesus, he is able to do great and wonderful deeds. Once he looks away from Jesus to the surrounding storm, he begins to sink. A quick prayer, "Lord, save me!" is enough for Jesus to reach out and lift Peter up. The scene previews a future time when Peter will speak bravely of following Jesus to death, only to deny him when the "storm" becomes intense. Peter will ask for and receive forgiveness from Jesus for his failings.

Matthew also shares a special message with his readers through this story. The early Church is like a boat struggling against the storms of persecution and the power of evil. Peter has an important role in the early Church and is held in high esteem by the time Matthew writes his Gospel. Some of the members of the early Church, caught in the confusion of the evil around them, are faltering in their faith. Through this story, they are reminded to call on Jesus to save them.

Dear sisters and brothers, we are living in the 21st Century, in a country which has many freedoms, however, our Catholic Church stands against secular laws which infringe on Canon Law. We have human rights, democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of belief... but we are forced to obey the laws of the government which are against Canon Law, forcing the clergies of the Catholic Church to break Canon Law in relation to disclosing the secrets of the confessional, ie. breaking the seal of confession.

This law was passed in the Victorian parliament last year (September 11, 2019). The Victorian government said it hopes it does not have to jail priests who fail to report child abuse revealed in Confession. The state's Parliament passed laws carrying a sentence of up to 3 years for failing to report abuse. Melbourne Catholic Archbishop Peter Comensoli said he and all his priests would choose jail over breaking the seal of confession.

And in Tasmania, Archbishop Julian Porteous stated that priests were "unable" to follow a secular law that required them to break the seal of confession. South Australia, Victoria, the Northern Territory and the ACT have passed similar laws requiring religious leaders to report child sex offences. Of course the Catholic Church would never condone child abuse in any form. The leaders of the Catholic Church are facing many difficulties now as when the Church was first begun - we too, need the presence of Jesus with us at this time.

There are other secular laws against the Canon Law of the Catholic Church, for example, the Catholic Church does not allow divorce, however, in our nation, Australia has a no-fault divorce system. The Catholic Church does not condone abortion. However, in Australia, there is a no-fault abortion system (legal to 24 weeks or legal post-24 weeks with two doctors' approval). The Church upholds the right to life of the child and the good health of the mother.

Dear sisters and brothers, I was born and grew up in a communist country, a country with a totalitarian communist regime, but the Vietnamese communist government has not forced Catholic priests to report sexual abuse, or forced Catholic priests to break the seal of the confessional, as in Australia. The laws of the political institution of the Vietnamese communist government do not interfere with the Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church as happens in Australia.

Dear sisters and brothers, I know that, these are very sensitive matters, I absolutely don't want to bring back pain or sadness to anyone. I really don't have the right to judge anyone, I just want to point out some real facts that are happening in this country, to prove that the Catholic Church in Australia does not have peace today, but is facing many "storms" and "waves" coming from the secular society. If for what I am sharing above makes someone hurt or upset, please forgive me!

The Church, the boat, is built not only for calm days, but for storms, not only for shallow creeks but for deep oceans, not only for a few people but for the whole human race. The Church is a sturdy boat that has lasted a couple of thousand years and has helped billions of people weather gigantic storms. Just as in a storm we hang on to the boat even more tightly, we should do the same in our Catholic life when the personal storms come.

The Gospel from Matthew today is the wonderful account of Jesus walking on the water and then inviting Saint Peter—who said that he wanted this gift—so walk with him. Saint Peter panics and lets fear get hold of him. And he sinks. "Do not be afraid." Pope Saint John Paul II often used those words to encourage others. We also must learn not to be afraid. Our faith will let us do amazing things. The most amazing is simply believing. From that faith, that belief, we are given strength for so many other things. The most important is to love and to serve others with all our strength. We must hear the words of Christ echo within us as we love and serve: Do not be afraid!

The Gospel reading today is not just about a storm on the sea but about the storms of life, you and I may not be caught in a storm at sea but we are all caught in the storms of life, whether those storms have to do with children, marriage, finances, health, emotional problems, work or other people. Our instinct when the storms come is to think that God has abandoned us. This Gospel teaches us that the Lord is with us even in the storm. The Lord is with our Church in the storms and many difficulties which the Church faces every day. Through the sacraments, through the Church, through our time of prayer, the Lord says to us, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.'

The Gospel story shows us the power of faith. To those with faith, Jesus is not a ghost from the past. He is the Son of God, who is present with us, and whose grace upholds us when things are too much for us. God's voice is the gentlest voice of all. God did not make himself heard to Elijah in the sound of the mighty wind or the earthquake, but in the whisper of a gentle breeze.

Since we live in a very noisy world, if we want to hear the voice of God, we need to create some stillness and quietness in our soul. (Elijah had to go to a cave to hear it). Many other voices clamour for our attention, voices that are loud, strident, and seductive. Yet, for those who know how to listen, God's gentle voice can make itself heard even in the midst of a storm. Over the roar of the wind and the waves, the Apostles heard the gentle voice of Jesus saying to them, 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' Amen.

Dear my Parishioners,

Due to globe pandemic crisis, we cannot see each other face to face even at churches of at homes. I miss all of you very much! Even though we are keeping the stage 4 of isolation and we have to apply the curfew between 8 pm to 5 am, it causes us not easy to deal with. However, let us be calm, don't be afraid because God his plan. Trust in God's mysterious providence!

May almighty God bless you and your family all!

Fr Tao Pham