

19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Matthew 14:22-33

Walking on water has become almost a cliché of divinity. We talk of someone walking on water when we make fun of their achievements. But it remains that to walk on water, to have power over the elements, is a power that belongs to God alone. For the apostles, Our Lord walking on the water does what God does. Just as at the feeding of the five thousand, which this gospel immediately follows, Our Lord did what God does. It isn't so much a matter of He who created having power over that which He created but about who is in control. Just as Our Lord can feed five thousand men as well as women and children with five loaves and two fish, so He can walk among the waves of a raging sea. Nothing stands in the way of God.

We often need to feel that someone is in control. Often we would like it to be ourselves because there is a great sense of security in believing that I can overcome any problem. The fact is that we are not always in control and, in truth, very rarely in control. Medicine doesn't always stop us from getting ill and it doesn't always cure. Money doesn't buy happiness but it can buy a whole lot of troubles. Truth may set my soul free but it might put the rest of me in a whole lot of trouble. So if I were in a small fishing boat in the sea in the middle of a storm then I would be frightened, too, because I know there is nothing that I can do to stop the storm.

From the very beginning of the gospel Our Lord is shown by St. Matthew to be in charge. He uses phrases like, "He *forced* the disciples to enter the boat," (Mt. 14:22) and, "he *dismissed* the crowds" (Mt. 14:23). Now why did the apostles enter the boat? We know it was evening so did they expect to reach the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is four-and-a-half miles wide, before dark? Whatever the reason they did start the crossing and maybe simply

because Our Lord told them to do so. However long they expected the crossing to take we know that they were still out at sea at the fourth watch, which is somewhere between 3:00 and 6:00 in the morning. So, really, they had been out at sea, trapped by the storm all night. And it is at the fourth watch, the last watch of the night, that Our Lord walks to them across the sea. If it is the last watch of the night and the apostles had been out at sea, in the middle of a storm, since the evening before, then really Our Lord seems to have left it to the last minute to save them. But that is how it often is, or at least feels for many of us. On the verge of drowning, when our hope has all but failed, and may very well have gone, it is then that Our Lord holds out His hand.

What this gospel teaches is that Our Lord doesn't stay away from the storms we face but walks out into the middle of them. He stretches out His hand and takes hold of us and gets into the boat with us. And sometimes that's the way it's going to be. In the middle of great pain and suffering and frustration and fear of what is happening and fear of what is coming next, Our Lord doesn't take it away but gets in there with us. Of course we would prefer that He calmed the storm but sometimes He doesn't and we just have to take his outstretched hand and hold on.

Someone defined compassion as seeing someone else who has falling down into a hole and getting down there in the hole with them. We want to believe that Our Lord makes everything better straight away, as soon as we ask, but sometimes we just have to wait for the fourth watch of the night, with our "little faith" (*Mt. 14:31*) and wait for Him to come across the water, believing that He will, knowing that it is really Him who is in control over everything.