

The Storm at Sea

A Homily by Fr. Paul Check

“...and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (Jn 1:14)

In the Name...

Many of you know about my work for Courage, the Catholic Church’s apostolate to men and women with same-sex attraction. On another day, I might try to explain something about the nature of this complex and thorny matter, in a manner appropriate for a Sunday sermon. For now, I would simply ask an occasional remembrance in your prayers, for the courage (small “c”) and the humility to conduct this ministry, very much now at the service of the universal Church after 30 years, according to the heart and mind of Christ.

In establishing a new location for the headquarters of the apostolate (we moved from Manhattan to Norwalk last fall), I had been thinking about what Gospel scene would be most helpful for me to consider from time to time as I look around the walls of my office...and awhile ago, I decided upon the events from today’s Gospel: the storm on the Sea of Galilee, where Our Lord rests peacefully in the transom of the boat as the Apostles struggle to maintain control of an increasingly deteriorating situation. Because of the mystery of the Incarnation—divinity in complete but distinct union with humanity—and because everything about Our Lord was perfect (no action of His was wasted or insignificant), this episode must be no less instructive for us in the life of the God-man than any other.

We hear the words *et habitavit in nobis* (...and dwelt among us) at the conclusion of every traditional Mass, and our minds can easily reflect for a moment on the many good words and works of Christ, and they should. His very active life was “poured out like a libation” (cf. Phil 2:17), and every aspect was useful for our instruction and sanctification. During His earthly life, the God made Man experienced cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue, sleeplessness, bodily suffering of the most intense kind. Jesus felt love, pity, indignation, joy, grief, and bodily fear. He worked, watched, and prayed, and lived the life of common people.

It is such a Master we love and serve, one who shares with us everything that is in our nature, save what is degrading to it. It is in that bond of common experience that He offers us a human friendship, and shows us the way to peace and life eternal.

When I think of Jesus asleep in the transom of the boat, I find abundant consolation and strength. Not much has changed for the barque of Peter in 2,000 years...the waves are punishing; but the Master is close at hand. We are not, of course, to take the sleeping Savior as insensitive or carefree...such a disposition would hardly bespeak love. Nor is it sufficient to my mind to leave this episode of the Gospel solely under the rubric of a test of our faith, which it surely is nonetheless...after all, Our Lord already knew where things stood in that regard.

There is more for us here, such as Christ-like encouragement, and I think we might consider that *when the desire for sacrifice is total, so must trust be complete as well*. “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me,” Jesus said (Jn 4:34), and later, He expressed the very same intention in different words: “Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!” (Lk 23:46) In thirty-three years of earthly life, what moved Our Lord was *not* first the results He hoped to achieve (noble though they certainly were), but rather His resolute desire to place Himself entirely at the disposal of His Father, to do His will in all things. Jesus’ sacrifice was full...and His trust in His Father was commensurate with His sacrifice...and all of this was so because He knew and was confident in His Father’s goodness.

Et habitavit in nobis. How simple is the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: give your heart fully to the Good God; you have every reason to believe in Him. *Be peaceful*. He will do the rest. Our Blessed Lord taught us this message by precept and by His example, no less when He was asleep than when He was awake. On the turbulent Sea of Galilee, He is no less about His Father’s business than elsewhere.

And certainly this is true of Bethlehem, as well. The Babe asleep at Mary's breast is the same Mighty God who sleeps in the transom. Viewed under one imperfect lens, one might say that either occasion does not seem important to the work of the redemption...and to extend that a bit, another question might arise: What was Jesus doing anyway for 30 years of hidden life? Again, it does not seem, from a practical perspective, to have been very productive time.

Faced by such questions, we can remind ourselves that God does not need our works or our worry. He only desires our hearts, as the Father desired the heart of the Son...and the Son was eager to offer His heart to the Father, especially when His suffering was most acute. The measure of love does not lie in utility or efficiency, or even in the accomplishment of important results, *but in humble self-giving*. And Christ instructed us perfectly in this essential virtue—humility—by simply and faithfully carrying out His Father's will each day, because He trusted and loved Him.

In the trials and demands of this “vale of tears,” we can be confident—as part of our divine and Catholic Faith—that Our Lord is always with us. I wish to say this with reverence and respect, not knowing the crosses each of you bear. But I am mindful of my own need to remember that Christ is always present in my priestly life, especially when the work does not seem to be going very well. I wonder whether the tenderness of the Savior towards us, to whom “He gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:12), even *intensifies* as our anxieties threaten the calm we struggle to preserve.

In his account of the Storm on the Sea of Galilee, St. Mark furnishes the word that Our Blessed Lord uses to calm the wind and the water. “Peace!”, He says (Mk 4:39)...the same word and the first word He uses to steady the hearts of the Apostles after He is risen from the dead. Prior to His Passion, He promised them the peace the world cannot give...*or take*. (cf. Jn 14:27) Many concerns, both personal and ecclesial, threaten that peace from time to time...but they are no match for a divine promise.

Jesus never lost His peace—a truth so convincingly expressed as He sleeps on the Sea of Galilee—He never lost His peace *because His self-donation was total*, as was His trust in the goodness of His Father. Our Lord urges us, and I do not exclude myself, to do likewise: to always keep our peace because nothing is outside the providence of God, even our weakness and failure. My hero Blessed John Henry Newman would have said it more elegantly, but when the Evil One strikes hard, as if to knock the very stuffing right out of us, we must return our minds and hearts to the slumbering Savior, in the wood of the crib, in the wood of the boat, and on the wood of the Cross.

Et habitavit in nobis... The Prince of Peace will never leave His Church and will never leave our souls. His name will ever be Emmanuel, and He knows that the truest desire of the Christian heart is to make the offering of that heart *complete*. For that, His grace and love are never wanting, even when He sleeps.