

ORDINARY SUNDAY XIX "A"
AUGUST 9/10, 2014

Today's Gospel story of the meeting between Jesus and Peter amid the storm on Lake Galilee is very familiar to us. At the same time, the scene is not one completely foreign. Who of us has not seen similar scenes played out in the various forms of news media: a fireman reaching out a hand to an outstretched arm of a person in a burning building; a drowning person reaching out to a rescuer in a boat; an emergency worker extending a hand to a person trapped underneath the rubble of a building that has collapsed due to an earthquake, tornado or some other reason. Such images make for dramatic news coverage. All of them have something in common with the scene in today's Gospel, like it they are icons, windows into the mystery of faith, human faith; divine faith.

While no words are generally reported in the news stories about such dramatic rescues, I suspect that as the rescuer reaches out to the person in peril something like this is said: "Take my hand. Hang on tight. Don't look back. Keep looking at me. You're going to make it."

The same dynamic plays out in the encounter between Jesus and Peter. Peter is able to come to Jesus across the stormy sea as long as he keeps focused on Jesus. As soon as he becomes distracted, Peter begins to sink, only to have Jesus rescue him and gently rebuke his "little faith."

St. Matthew preserved this story to teach us, too, an important lesson of faith. The physical storm on Lake Galilee can also serve as a metaphor for our lives of discipleship. Who of us in our personal, family, community, or church life has not known times of stress and storm, sometimes so severe that we feel we are, or in fact have, lost control, lost our way, lost the physical and mental capacity to deal with the situation that confronts us. It is precisely here, especially amid the storms of life, that Jesus comes to us with his assuring word, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid" (Mt. 14:27). Like the prophet Elijah in the first reading this voice of Jesus may be a still small voice speaking to us from the depths of our soul as we are engaged in prayer, perhaps as many have testified praying in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. It may be a word that resounds as we

encounter Jesus in the Scripture readings at Mass or in our own personal reading and reflection. It may be the word of strength following the reception of Holy Communion at Mass, or the word of forgiveness and peace as a potentially heavy burden of sin is lifted in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It may sound in us through the care and concern of another person through an email, text, tweet, a hand-written note, an unexpected phone call or personal visit, through the listening presence of a Stephen Minister or a professionally trained counselor or spiritual director. How and when it happens is not the issue—it is what we do with it. Do we grasp it? Or are we so distracted by other voices that we either do not hear it, or hearing it, choose to follow other voices or ignore it?

As long as Peter keeps his focus on Jesus, he is safe. As soon as he becomes distracted, looks away, he begins to sink. The invitation of faith is to set our focus on Jesus and not become distracted by the many forces that surround and bombard us, offering pseudo-salvation.

Like those dramatic rescue scenes we hear and see in the news, today's Gospel reminds us that faith is a relationship with a person. A rescue worker does not engage a person in intellectual or technical discussion. That has its place, surely. But first of all is the invitation to faith—"Trust me." So, too, Jesus.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI summarized this fundamental precept of faith in a Wednesday morning audience address at St. Peter's in Rome on November 14, 2012.

Many people today have a limited idea of the Christian faith, because they identify it with a mere system of beliefs and values rather than with the truth of a God who revealed himself in history anxious to communicate with man personally, in a relationship of love with him. In fact, at the root of every doctrine or value is the event of the encounter between man and God in Jesus Christ. Christianity, before being a moral or ethic, is the event of love, it is the acceptance of the Person of Jesus.

Whatever may be befalling us today, Jesus is here and Jesus reaches out his hand and says to us: "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid" (Mt. 14:27).