

As soon as Jesus gets in the boat with His disciples, the wind ceases. Why, then, doesn't He come to them sooner? It's the fourth watch of the night, between three and six in the morning. They begin to go across the sea late in the evening. And it is at that time when Jesus sees His disciples making headway painfully. They are "being tormented," is how this reads in the Greek. Yet He waits long hours before He comes to them.

This story ends in a good way. But the disciples do not know this at the time. They have already had a long, exhausting day. They were supposed to enjoy some rest and relaxation. But that never happened. Instead, more than five thousand people showed up, and the disciples were overwhelmed. At the end of the day, Jesus compels them to get into a boat and go across the sea, but the wind torments them. This is no leisurely cruise for them. This is exhaustion upon exhaustion.

And you've been there, haven't you? You have been in that boat with the disciples. You might be in that boat right now. It's a struggle. Life is a struggle. It can be tormenting at times. We can relate to the disciples when it says "*the wind was against them.*" Some of you are struggling to pay your bills. Others of you are dealing with the unknown of various diseases. Some of you have very real concerns about the welfare of your children and grandchildren. Others of you are overwhelmed by troubled relationships. Making headway for you, too, is painful.

And where's Jesus? He's up there on the mountain praying it says. Prayer is good. But when His disciples need Him, and we need Him, shouldn't He end His prayer with "Amen," and come to help? But maybe we shouldn't go there. Maybe we should let Him decide when to help and how to help.

So, the wind is against His disciples. They are being severely tested out there on the sea. But it's wind. It's not a life-threatening storm. It's a struggle for them, and they are exhausted. But they are not about to perish under the waves. He sees them from up on the mountain. And surely, He is praying for them. But do they need Him to stop the wind? No. What they need is the struggle.

And so do we. We should pity the person whose life is a leisurely pleasure cruise. That's like a child who is never disciplined, never corrected. Or a Christian whose faith is never tested. How can that child ever mature? And how can that Christian remain a Christian? We need the wind. We need it to be against us. How often, and how severe, we leave that in God's hands.

Just like with the disciples, Jesus sees our struggles. He sees that we, too, make headway painfully in life. And He is praying for us, too. Will we perish? No. It's just wind. It's a struggle for us, sometimes a daily struggle. But if it's just the wind that is against us, we have no reason to fear, because God is not against us. In fact, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" St. Paul writes these words. And we can say in response? "Who cares! Who cares how badly the wind is against me, because Jesus is for me!"

But is He? Is Jesus for me? The disciples may have wondered if He was. When He walks out to them on the sea, He intends to pass by them. If He was for them, wouldn't He come to them? What about you? Do you ever say, "If Jesus is for me, why does He seem to pass me by? He leaves me in my boat to struggle with the wind, and He just appears to walk right on by me."

Friend, there is something here that we must understand, and it's vital. We don't like it when the wind is against us. But there is something much worse than just struggling with the wind; much worse than the wind being against us. And what is that? It's failing to recognize Jesus. We see this here with His disciples. They scream, they cry out in fear. Not because the wind is against them, but because they fail to recognize Jesus. They think He is a ghost, a phantom. And they are terrified.

Now Jesus comes to them. Now He speaks to them. Now He gets in the boat with them and the wind ceases. Jesus was content to walk right past them. They were okay. They were struggling, but they were making headway, painful though it was. But because they do not recognize Him, and this causes them great terror, He assures them: "*Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.*" And He comes to them.

There is nothing worse, nothing more terrifying than not recognizing Jesus. This is where unbelievers are. They do not recognize Jesus, not as their Lord and Savior. This should not happen with His disciples. But it did out on the Sea of Galilee. And it does also with us. When we, who are His baptized disciples, go through our daily life without recognizing Jesus, this is when we truly need Him. The wind cannot make us perish. But not recognizing Jesus can.

That's why He has brought you here again today. So that you recognize Jesus in holy water, holy food, and holy words. You know who does recognize Jesus? Little Rowena. He came to her today in Holy Baptism. And He gave her faith to recognize Him. Will she face the wind in her life? Absolutely. And that's okay. In fact, she will need to. But what she will need most in her life is what we all need most – to recognize each and every day that we belong to Jesus because we are baptized into His death and resurrection. And every Sunday to recognize Jesus who comes to us through the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

We can even recognize Jesus when the wind is against us. For in our struggles, we are reminded of the struggles He endured for us. On the cross everything was against Him, even His Heavenly Father. And He did that for you so that no matter who, or what, is against you, you can be assured that God is not against you.

And here, let me say this, for this is the truth. Even though you and I have lived in ways that are against God, He is not against you. Even though you and I have, so often, failed to recognize Jesus, He does not fail to recognize you. You are His child in your baptism. He knows you. He loves you. And best of all, He forgives you. Yes, for all those times when you lived in a sinful way against God, He absolutely does forgive you. For every time you failed to recognize who He is in your life, He is not angry with you, He forgives your failure, He forgives your sin. All of you, and I mean each and everyone of you, God forgives for Jesus' sake.

His words are also for you: "*Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid.*" The winds will probably never stop blowing against you. Not until the day that Jesus brings you to the heavenly shore. It's okay. Your story ends in a good way. And that's because Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and He is never against you. Amen.