

**Matthew 14:22-33**

If walking on water was an Olympic sport, Peter just lost his chance to win the gold medal. He didn't do very well. As the saying goes, he choked under pressure. But then again, Peter might have won the gold by default because none of the other disciples were even willing to step out of the boat and at least give it a try.

Now granted, they were all exhausted...Peter included. For six to eight hours, or more, they had been battling the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee. And it was night, around 4:00 in the morning. They hadn't slept. Before they had piled into the boat earlier that evening, they had already endured a long day feeding more than five thousand people. And what's more, when Jesus came to them walking on the sea, they screamed like little girls thinking they were seeing a ghost.

Now Jesus could have spared His disciples this agonizing difficulty which they were going through had He simply told them to walk around the lake. When He dismissed the five thousand, that's what they did. They didn't pile into boats. They walked on the safety of dry ground. But St. Matthew records for us that Jesus made His disciples get into a boat and row across the water. He sent them, with full knowledge, right into the heart of the storm.

But that's exactly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Entering the waters of baptism in the boat of the Church puts us on the path, not around the water on dry ground, but right through the water with all the winds, and waves, and fears, and exhaustion.

The simple fact is that life would be a lot less complicated if we were not Jesus' disciples. For the most part, it would be a whole lot easier. Those who are not disciples of Jesus have no one to answer to but themselves. If they want to commit adultery, get an abortion, get drunk, use curse words, they don't worry what the Bible says about such things. They aren't concerned that the Church calls such actions sinful. They just do them. Those who are not Jesus' disciples deal with a lot less guilt. They skip church without batting an eyelash. They don't set aside money for the Lord, and they think nothing of it. They say what they want, desire what they want, and live however they want.

Walking around the water on dry ground is a whole lot easier than taking the boat, as a disciple of Jesus, into the waters right through the heart of the storm. As a disciple of the Lord you have to contend with the devil. Others he pretty much leaves alone. He spends most of his time warring against those in the Church, in the boat. As a disciple of Jesus, temptation is a daily struggle. We know how God wants us to live, but it's so difficult to follow through. Our flesh is always wanting to do the wrong thing. As a disciple of Jesus, living in the world is, in itself, a constant battle. Our friends urge us to let go of our morals and "live a little." We're taught to compromise our Christian beliefs and be more open and accepting to differing points of view.

The truth is that living as a Christian is difficult. Battling fierce waves is not a problem for those who walk the path around the water; but for us in the Church, when we entered the waters of Holy Baptism we also entered that path where sea storms do their worst; where struggles are constant; where nerves become frazzled; and where, at times, it looks like all will be lost to the powers of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh.

I can imagine those disciples wondering, as they were battling the waves, why Jesus put them in that boat in the first place. And speaking of Jesus—where on earth was He? Had He left them to struggle against the storm all by themselves. After all, they were His disciples. They didn't choose this stormy path through the water. He chose it for them. And so shouldn't He be there with them and for them?

There are times when we feel this way. When the waves of cancer or heart disease come crashing over us, we wonder where Jesus is to help us. When the winds of temptation blow so hard against us, in our struggle we may feel that Jesus has abandoned us. But He hasn't. He was there in the water with His disciples. They did not recognize Him. "It's a ghost!" they cried. But it was Jesus right there with them and for them.

Friend, Jesus didn't bring you to the waters of baptism so that He could abandon you there. He is in the water with you. He may appear as a ghost to us, but that's because we walk too much, not by faith, but by sight. In the bread and wine of Holy Communion that's no ghost; it's Jesus here in His flesh for you. In the words given to you Sunday mornings that's no ghost; it's Jesus giving you His words of life to sustain you even in the worst of storms.

Now I don't know what Peter was thinking when he told Jesus, "Command me to come to you on the water." And perhaps he wasn't thinking...he simply acted on faith: If that is Jesus there on the water, then I can do the impossible and walk on the water to Him. And for a while he did...until he took his eyes off of Jesus. Then he fell. Then he began to sink.

How often aren't we like Peter thinking that we can do the impossible? I can overcome this temptation. I can cope with this crisis. I can make it as a Christian through life. I won't fall. Jesus is with me. I'll be fine. But we're never fine, because we're like Peter. It's too easy to take our eyes off of Jesus and look instead to the wind and waves around us. It's too difficult for us to fix our eyes on His Word. You and I fall so easily into sin. We do not trust God perfectly. We are weak. We are mortal. We are like Peter.

The most courageous thing Peter did, however...the thing that showed his faith best of all is not that he was, for a while, walking on the water. It's that when he fell, he cried to Jesus for help. "Lord, save me!" were the most important words he uttered that day, because with those words he admitted that he was a failure; that he was perishing; that he could not save himself; and that only Jesus could save him. The thief on the cross cried those same words as he was dying. Jesus saved that man on that day, and Jesus saved Peter on this day.

We need to ask ourselves in our day, how often do we cry those same words? Do you recognize the wretched sinner that you and I are? Do you see your helpless condition? Do you believe that you and I are powerless against the foes of sin, death, and hell? Do you admit that you and I often fall beneath the waves? If you do not agree with these, then why would you ever cry to Jesus for help? But Jesus did not put you on the path around the water where there are no storms and struggles—He put you in the water. He brought you to the waters of baptism making you His disciple there, so that you would see that without Him, you and I will perish; so that daily we cry to Him for help and salvation. The most

faithful thing a Christian can do is not to walk on top of the waves of temptation, but to cry to Jesus when he falls beneath those waves.

Is that where you are at right now in your life? Have you been struggling with sin? Have you given in to the struggle? Are you filled with doubts and fears? Do not be afraid. Jesus, right now, is reaching out His hands to hold you in His grasp. He will not let you perish. He forgives you for taking your eyes off of Him. His hands which were pierced with nails for you are holding you. He stretched out His hands in death for you so that today He may give you His words of life. He endured the fierce storm of hell on the cross for you so that whatever storm you are facing, His hands will not ever let you go. Jesus became weak for you in death, so that now when you need Him, He is your strong Deliverer. Jesus struggled against your worst enemies, and He overcame them on the cross, so that He may lift you out of the waves and bring you safely across the waters.

St. Matthew tells us that the disciples did make it through the storm. They arrived in peace and safety on the other side because Jesus was with them in the boat. Here in His Word and Sacraments Jesus is with you. Will you safely make it through your crises? Will you endure the storms in life? Will you arrive in peace on the shores of heaven? Yes, because of Jesus. He alone is your Savior. He has forgiven each one of you—He is on your side; He is for you. And He is, right now, here in the water, in the storm, in the boat with you. Amen.