

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about God's consolation. They show that God is a refuge and a shelter in time of distress. They invite us to entrust our life to God and to hope for his help in time of need.

The first reading of the book of Kings recalls the story of the flight of Elijah to the mountain Horeb. It shows how, unlike what he thought, God was not in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but rather in the peaceful happening of a whispering.

What is behind this text is the idea that the life of the servants of God is not always easy. Another idea is that sometimes, in order to succeed, we need to protect ourselves so that the ideal for which we are fighting for may not die with us. The last idea is relative to the truth that God is beyond our imagination and perception, because he dwells in silence.

This text helps understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus rescues the disciples caught up in the tossed boat. First of all, the Gospel starts by mentioning Jesus' withdrawal up the mountain to pray after the multiplication of bread. Then, it talks about the trouble that the disciples had as their boat was tossed by a strong wind to the point of being about to sink.

After that, it mentions the presence of Jesus coming to the disciples by walking on the waters while they thought it was a ghost. Finally, the Gospel speaks of Jesus' assurance given to them, of Peter's request to come to Jesus by walking on water, and of Jesus' reproach to Peter about his doubt when he realized how strong the wind was. The Gospel ends up with the confession of those who were on the boat who recognized in Jesus the Son of God.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the ever comforting presence of Jesus. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. I believe, in fact, that each one of us has had this experience of what we call a "scary moment". This is a moment when suddenly, without a slightest warning, our beloved one is rushed to the emergency in the hospital or our beloved one is taken by a sickness for which we have never been prepared.

Such a moment is always dreadful, stressful and fearful, because it leaves us without knowing what will happen to us in the following hours and what the fate of our beloved ones will be. I believe also that each one of us has had this experience where things do not work at all in our life and our relationship, when the crisis of life is so big that it increases our disappointment, sorrows or frustrations.

The uncertainty in which someone finds himself at such moments makes that there is nothing else to do than to cry to God for help, like Peter. The uncertainty in which many live those moments is such that they feel alone and abandoned even in midst of the crowd.

And yet, at those moments, as difficult as they might be, Jesus is always with us, stretching out his hand to rescue us. Because we are blinded by the intensity of our sadness and sorrow, we fail to recognize him. What we need at such moments is to open the eyes of our hearts in order to see that Jesus is present and coming to us.

Because Jesus is ever present, we understand why he reproaches Peter for having doubted while he was walking on the waters toward him. This reproach means that the most difficult thing in our life is not the events we are going through or the problems we are confronted with, but rather our trust in Jesus that even in this difficult time, he has not abandoned us.

That is why we have to understand that faith is less about the existence of God or the belief that he has created the world than trusting in him, in spite of bad things happening in our life. It is for that reason that Jesus calls Peter as someone having little faith, because he doubted that he would save him and his companions.

Literally, this episode means that even though Peter was surrounded by the waves and the boat was about to sink, nothing bad would happen to him and his friends, because Jesus is greater than the forces and the phenomena of nature. In that sense, Jesus is the calmer of the storms of life. The problem, however, is that when we are overwhelmed by the storms of life, we are often so blinded by our pain and suffering that we forget to open our eyes to see Jesus coming to us.

Moreover, we have been educated in such a way that we have to count on ourselves in order to find a solution to our problems. As good as that might be, it would be an illusion, however, to think that we can resolve all our problems alone. There certainly are things we can do ourselves; for some others, we need God's help. There is no shame to recognize our inability to resolve some problems of our life.

That is why it is important to call upon Jesus in time of troubles so that he may save us, as Peter did. In fact, the tossing of the boat by the wind is the symbol of the difficulties we are confronted with in life. There are times, indeed, when we are up against the wind of life, and life itself is like a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our temptations, with our sorrows and with our decisions.

At such time, there is no need to struggle alone, for Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with hand stretched out to save us, and with his calm voice bidding us take heart and have no fear. Because Jesus is a comforting presence and a calmer of the dangers surrounding us, we should always have him at our side, because he knows when to intervene and rescue us. When we are overwhelmed by countless problems, let us call upon Jesus. May he bring us his peace! God bless you all!

1 Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a; Romans 9: 1-5; Matthew 14: 22-33

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