

Fisch-ing Lines

by Deacon Howard Fischer



The story of Jesus walking on the water has spawned hundreds of humorous jokes over the centuries, but we are missing the point of the event if we focus on its miraculous nature. The story is less about the supernatural power of Christ than it is a story about encountering the presence of God and the strength of our faith in responding to that presence.

In the face of a powerful storm and fearing for their lives, the Apostles encounter the presence of Christ. In the midst of the chaos and turmoil, Jesus tells them not to be afraid, to trust in him. With his usual “act now-think later” approach, Peter accepts Jesus' invitation and leaves the security of the boat. He does fine as long as he focuses on Jesus, but as soon as he begins to contemplate “What the heck am I doing out here?” he begins to sink. Of course, Peter is saved by the love of Jesus, who reaches out to grab him.

Our lives are often in turmoil and chaos too. We face economic uncertainties, the fragility of our health, the difficulty of loving commitment, and the pain of broken relationships. In the midst of this, Christ calls us to make the leap of faith and grab hold of his outstretched hand.

Faith is not a magic wand that prevents life from becoming stormy. Faith is more than the acceptance of a body of doctrines, although doctrines are important. Rather, faith is a consuming trust in God's justice, love, and mercy. It is growing in love and intimacy with Jesus Christ. Faith is not passive. It requires us to act, to get up and leave the boat and head for Christ. It is the staking of one's life on God's promises.

Yet, like Peter, our faith is often weak. Perhaps that is because we are always looking for some spectacular display of God's power or hoping for something obvious like a phone call from heaven. But God usually doesn't choose the dramatic approach in reaching out to us. Today's first reading (one of my favorite Scripture stories) gives us yet another mountaintop encounter with God. But the

prophet Elijah does not meet God in awesome displays of nature as he expected. Rather, it is in the whisper of sheer silence that God spoke to Elijah.

We, too, expect the Almighty to be big and instead miss him in the things we think ordinary. We forget that God came into our world as a helpless little baby. God in his deepest nature is love, not power; forgiveness, not retaliation. The God who speaks in storms more often speaks in the silence of a smile and in the warmth of an embrace. Thus, you and I must become the agents of God's presence who spread smiles and embraces and all acts of charity. Having been rescued by his grasp time and time again ourselves, you and I need to be like Christ and reach our hands out to save those who are sinking in one of life's many storms.

Jesus does not ask us to hide in some boat. Rather, he beckons us, as he did Peter, to come out and join him in the midst of the raging sea of life, with all of its difficulties, risks and chaos. Jesus does not promise us a storm-free life, but he does promise to bring us safely into port. We must live and act with this trust when the seas of life are calm and when they are stormy. If you wish to contact me, please leave a note in the Parish Office or send an email to deaconhwhf99@yahoo.com.