

HOMILY for 19th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel talks about the need for more faith to recognize God & God's work in our challenging times. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this classic cute story that I'd like to share with you.

Old Mrs. Watkins awoke one spring morning to find that the river had flooded not only her basement but the entire first floor of her house. And looking out her bedroom window, she saw that the water was still rising. Two men passing by in a rowboat shouted up an invitation to row to safety with them.

"No, thank you," replied Mrs. Watkins tartly. "The Lord will provide." The men shrugged & rowed on.

By evening the water level forced Mrs. Watkins to climb out on her roof where she was spotted by a cheerful man in a motorboat. "Don't worry, lady," he called across the water. "I'll pick you up."

"Please don't trouble yourself; the Lord will provide." Mrs. Watkins then turned her back on her would-be rescuer, who buzzed off down the river.

Pretty soon Mrs. Watkins was forced to take refuge atop her chimney, the only part of the house still above water. Fortunately, a Red Cross cutter came by on patrol. "Jump in, Madam," urged a rescue worker.

Mrs. Watkins shook her head vehemently. "The Lord will provide." So, the boat departed, the water rose, & the old woman drowned.

Dripping wet & thoroughly annoyed, she came through the Pearly Gates & demanded to speak to God. "What happened?" she cried. "I thought the Lord would provide."

"For crying out loud, lady," said God wearily, "I sent you three boats!"

As you can see, it is not easy to have faith in God & see God's work for us in challenging times. For we often feel overwhelmed by the situation & wonder where God is in those difficult moments. We might mistakenly assume that something has accidentally happened without realizing the hand of God in it. That is why it takes an eye of faith to see God's work & presence in our daily lives. It takes years for a saint to train oneself & master that spiritual skill. A saint could see how God is at work even in one's toughest situation or one's dark night of the soul while a normal person might not recognize God's presence even on a good & brightest day. That seems to be the case in this Sunday's Gospel as the disciples could barely recognize Jesus while their boat was tossed about by the rough waves. Here is how today's Gospel describes their situation for us, "...As evening drew on..., the boat, already several hundred yards out from shore, was being tossed about in the waves raised by strong head winds. At about three in the morning, He [Jesus] came walking toward them on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. 'It is a ghost!' they said, & in their fear they began to cry out."

I had a personal experience like the disciple did. On my harrowing escape out of Viet Nam, my boat ran into a huge scary storm in the Pacific Ocean. The waves were over twenty some feet high as heavy rain kept pouring down on us all night long. Our boat was tossed around like a piñata. We did not know if we could make it out of that nasty situation alive. Like the disciples in today's Gospel, we could not find God anywhere that terrifying night. We were scared & needed God to reassure us & lend us a helping hand. That seems to be how the disciples felt on this memorable night. The waves were unusually rough; & they were all scared to death. Even with Jesus' presence, they thought it was a ghost & felt all alone & scared. Similarly, we might run into those huge & scary waves in our lives & feel overwhelmed by their destructive power. When we feel that way, we need

to learn from Peter & cry out, "Lord, if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water." Then, we wait for Jesus' response. Hopefully, He would tell us as He said to Peter, "Come!" Peter wanted to come to Jesus to seek reassurance & guidance. He needed to make sure that it was the Lord Jesus, not a ghost or a fake image of Him. Like doubting Thomas, Peter wanted to come close to Jesus & touch Him. That is the only way Peter could tell if it was really His Master or not.

We should learn from Peter & doubting Thomas & adopt their test of authenticity on spiritual matters. If we want to know that something is real, we must come close to it & scrutinize it. We cannot observe it from afar or take the words of others for it. Unfortunately, we have seen many folks in our time do not invest enough time & effort on spiritual matters & try to get to know Jesus personally. They have relied on testimonies of others & have been duped by fake information. So, we must take time to study Jesus & spend time with Him in prayers & sacraments like the Holy Eucharist. Otherwise, we would easily be misled by the agents of darkness & not be able to tell if it were Jesus or a ghost. However, Peter's personal journey toward Jesus was still rough as today's Gospel tells us, "...Peter got out of the boat & began to walk on the water, moving toward Jesus. But, when he perceived how strong the wind was, becoming frightened he began to sink, & cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus at once stretched out His hand & caught him. 'How little faith you have!' He exclaimed 'Why did you falter?'" Evidently on his spiritual road toward Jesus, Peter encountered some headwind & tested moments & began to have doubt. Like Peter, we might have some challenging situations that make us question our faith in Jesus. But, if we persist in our Christian faith & invite Jesus into our humble abode, the wind would die down & our peaceful life would be restored. That is the first blessing for being near Jesus.

However, today's First Reading reveals to us another blessing for being near the Lord as following, "...The Lord said, 'Go outside & stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by.' A strong & heavy wind was rending the mountains & trembling rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak." So, the Lord was not in a strong & heavy wind, or an earthquake, or the fire. Rather, the Lord chose to appear in the whispering sound. Like the rest of the world, we often associate God with power & assume that God would appear only in powerful & loud phenomena. But, as we have seen, God chose to show up in the form of the whispering sound, totally contrary to our conventional assumption. Therefore, don't ever assume that we have figured God out & wanted God to appear or do whatever we have expected. For God might surprise us & do the opposite. We just need to let God be God & allow God to carry out God's will for us. The only people who could realize & understand it are the ones who are near the Lord. That is another blessing for being near the Lord.

My dear brothers & sisters, can you recognize Jesus in your daily life? Would you ask Him to let you come to Him & check Him out like Peter did? By coming close to Him, we will be able to get to know Him better & strengthen our relationship with Him. That way we will know His voice & appreciate His way of life amidst all the distractions around us. That is why we Catholics have tried to find every opportunity to be near Jesus such as at Mass, in prayers, & in helping the misfortunate & the social outcast. Hopefully you will search out those opportunities & other ones to get to know Him better.