

19<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, A  
IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

*"It is a ghost! ... Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid" (Matt. 14: 26, 27).*

***One of the questions that keep popping up in most minds during this period of coronavirus uncertainty is "Where is God?"*** At perplexing times, such as this, when a man is confounded with how best to trudge through difficult situations, the human desire surges towards a mightier strength and seeks coping mechanisms more powerful than himself. These, he finds in God. This has been our experience during this pandemic imbroglio. We seem to be torn between contrasting the poles of certainty and doubt as we wriggle daily through this course. John C. Lennox, an Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at the University of Oxford, published a short but valuable book in which he preoccupied himself with this whole question. The book is aptly titled *Where is God in a Coronavirus World?* (2020). These words from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, 19<sup>th</sup>-century preacher: "God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His Hand, we must trust His heart" summarise his conclusions. In the Readings at this Mass we encounter Elijah, Paul and Peter, with the disciples of Jesus in similar struggles.

***The Readings at the Mass of this 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A,*** sits well with the realities of our times and therefore, meets us squarely at the threshold of this dilemma. The First Reading (1Kigs. 19: 9, 11-13) relates the concluding part of the flight of the prophet of God, Elijah, who having conquered four hundred priests of Baal in the epic battle at Carmel (1 Kgs. 18: 17-46), was threatened by Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab: "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow, I have not dealt with you as you dealt with them – referring to the slaughtering of the prophets of Baal (1Kgs. 19: 2). Elijah fled. He was fed by God's angels and prepared for the forty days' journey to Horeb, the mountain of God. It was there at Horeb he was instructed to go out and wait for the Lord. As he waited, he had a profound experience: God was not in the mighty wind. God was not in the earthquake. He was not in the fire. God was not in these great and powerful phenomena. God was in "the sound of a gentle breeze." I call Him, *The God of Unexpected Places*. Mother Teresa discovered this God when she found Christ in *the poorest of the poor*. St Francis of Assisi found Him in animals and nature. We need to look for this same God in unexpected places of our lives and unexpected

corners of our world. Just as the Saviour of the world was not born in a palace, so the God we are searching for may not be found in the riches and excesses of our squandering parlours. Just as Elijah did not hear Him in the powerful wind, the earthquake and the fire, we too may not hear His voice in the deafening noises that surround us in our world today. Let us look for Him in the unexpected places, let us listen to Him in the voices of the unexpected people. Isaiah instructs us: "Seek the Lord while He may be found, call out to Him while He may hear" (Is. 55: 6).

***St. Paul in the Second Reading (Rom. 9: 1-5)*** laments the blindness and the hardened hearts of the Jewish people which prevented them from finding God in His Son Jesus Christ and from hearing His voice in the familiar Son of the Carpenter. Part of the problems of the Jews at the times of Jesus and Paul was that they had their own projected nature of the Messiah and misguidedly expected God to order His doings according to their minds. This too is part of the problems of many Christians today. When it does not work out for us the way we plan or expected, then God is not real; God is to be doubted; God is to be forsaken. This attitude could sometimes lead to cynicism and scepticism, here we begin to either extremely doubt or completely deny everything divine. This is what most Jewish people suffered, and perhaps still suffering to this day with regards to the divinity of Jesus. We have to remember prophet Isaiah again who tells us: "God's ways are not our ways" (Is. 55: 8-9). In mysterious and unfathomable ways, God accomplishes His purposes in our lives. All we need is to be open to God's ways; keep the trust; and persevere in all adversities, knowing that He is the God All-knowing, All-powerful God, Who writes straight on crooked lines.

***The related miracle in the Gospel (Matt 14: 22-33)*** neatly wraps up all these themes in three perspectives:

1. ***The Fear of the Disciples/Assurance of Jesus:*** "It was the fourth watch of the night ... the disciples were far out into the lake ... battling with heavy sea, for there was a head wind ... the disciples saw Him walking on the lake ... they were terrified. 'It is a ghost' they said." Quite a terrifying scenario! Now they were not only fighting the danger of the turbulence but they had a ghost to contend with. Then Jesus called out to them: "Courage! It is I!" Our God is so close to us that He makes His presence when we most need Him. He was aware of their frightful state. He knew what they needed at that time. And

He made Himself available to help them. His words are what we need at a time like this. “Courage! It is I!” He knows what we are going through; how terrifying this time is for many people. He is present with us in the very depths of our fears, doubts and worries. Let His words minister to our hearts to calm us down, to reassure us and to take away our fears.

2. ***The Faith/Doubt of Peter:*** “Lord, if it is You, tell me to come to You across the water.” These words of Peter at face value may appear as an expression of doubt. But it is certainly an affirmation of faith in His Master. He knew that nothing was impossible with his Master. This faith manifests in his initial confidence to walk on the water at the invitation of Jesus. But that faith began to wane when “he felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink.” This short journey of Peter is the story of our faith journey. We began with so much enthusiasm and zeal at our First Holy Communion, at Confirmation and even Marriage: we were determined to be the best followers we could be, the best faith-bearers and the most faithful partners. But when our faith experiences the headwind and turbulence of life that make strenuous demands on us, we become afraid, timid, lukewarm and begin to sink into the ebb of doubts, complacency and unfaithfulness. Let us take a cue from Peter, who at the point of sinking cried out: “Lord! Save me!”
3. ***The Saving Love of God:*** St Matthew tells us that “Jesus put out His Hand at once and held him.” Note that there was no delaying in Jesus’ response – He responded *at once!* The Lord is present with us: “I am with you always” (Matt. 28: 20), He said. The Psalmist reminds us: “The Lord is close to the broken hearted” (Ps. 34: 18); “His help is near to those who fear Him” (Ps. 84: 10). The Lord will not refuse us any help in our times of need. His presence calms our fears in the storms of life. His saving help restores, invigorates and makes us whole. St. Paul says: “I can do all things through Christ, Who strengthens me” (Phil. 4: 13). No matter what has been, no matter what we may be going through and no matter what is to come, the saving love of God is available to us to enable us and empower us at our weakest moments.

***Dear friends, let us pay attention to the little things in our lives,*** the “sound of the gentle breeze” and our lives shall be the very testimony we need to proclaim to the world: “Truly, You are the Son of God.”

