



August 13, 2023

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Take courage, it is I."

Matthew 14:27



Dear Friends,

Like Byron, there are strong winds that can suddenly appear on the Sea of Galilee (a large lake). The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by very steep hills or small mountains. On the northwest corner of the lake is a canyon that allows wind from the Mediterranean to flow into the valley. When that happens squalls can toss boats about on the water. Galilean fishermen knew that they had no control over nature. No one could predict a storm that suddenly and unexpectedly breaks out. They believed in spirits, including wind spirits, that play havoc with human life.

The only remedy for humans is to find a more powerful spirit to go against the annoying spirit. This of course is God and God's broker/representative, Jesus. Throughout this Gospel, Jesus demonstrates his power to control evil and mischievous spirits. Earlier in Matthew's account, Jesus is asleep in the boat when a violent storm broke out. The disciples wake Jesus and plead for help. Jesus rebukes the winds and sea and there is a dead calm.

In today's story Jesus is absent when a strong wind and waves batter the boat. The passengers are frightened. The disciples see what they think is a ghost, that is Jesus, walking on the water toward them. (Some scholars think this is a resurrection account placed earlier in the story of Jesus.) They are afraid and Jesus tells them, "*Take courage, it is I.*"

Then Peter steps out of the boat to meet Jesus. He looks around and sees the strong wind and waves and becomes afraid. His faith wavers and he began to sink. Jesus grabs him and he reprimands their lack of loyalty, "*Why are you afraid, you of little faith?*" God is a patron who never fails those who are loyal to him. Faith is loyalty.

The last few years have been like a turbulent storm. We had Covid. We had to struggle with mask mandates, vaccines, and the lock down. People were arguing over the pros and cons of such precautions. Over one million people died in the U.S. Here at St. Anne, we had several funerals for young people who had died in tragic circumstances: several car accidents, a brother and sister shot to death, and a suicide. Then we have lost some of our older, key people. Last year, I and the parish had to negotiate the storm of my own illness which knocked me out of commission for several months of treatment and recovery. I am thankful I made it through.

Since Covid there has been a drop in church attendance here and everywhere. The diocese has embarked on a process that is leading to mergers of parishes which may lead to closures. If we keep following current patterns there will not be enough priests for each parish. Due to the overwhelming number of lawsuits (over 330) against the diocese, the Diocese of Oakland has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization. This has justifiably angered those who are suing because they had been abused by priests. The pedophilia scandal and the episcopal cover-ups have disheartened many. This is a storm that has not yet passed. We must pray for justice.

In such times we cannot keep looking around at the wind and the waves that are battering us. Otherwise, we will sink into the abyss. What is needed is our loyalty. God who is always loyal will bring us through the storms of life. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who has already won for us the victory over the spirit of evil and death!

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church