

Dear Friends,

In August last year more than eight thousand people crossed the English Channel in small boats from mainland Europe, attempting to reach Britain. Even in the summer such crossings can be precarious. The small boats are often in poor condition and overcrowded. In November 2021 a boat capsized, taking thirty-one lives, after the passengers desperately called for help for six hours. The dinghy floundered in choppy waters without rescue.

The 2019 film *The Flood* gives insight into fears of passengers in a small boat on a rough sea. Asylum seekers Haile from Eritrea, is in a boat full of refugees crossing the Mediterranean. It is buffeted by large waves and springs a leak. Despite the frantic efforts of the passengers to shovel the water out with their hands the boat sinks. Haile survives but we later see him on a beach in Italy littered with life jackets, remnants from many similar journeys. Several thousand refugees are killed crossing the Mediterranean and seas around Western Europe every year, and thousands more face a perilous journey as the water lashing around their unseaworthy inflatable boats threatens to end their lives. Throughout Haile's trials in the water and on land he has faith in God. During his time in a refugee camp in Northern France, waiting for an opportunity to travel to England, we see Haile seeking comfort in prayer at the makeshift church in the camp.

Today's Gospel tells a story about fear of drowning and faith in God. It comes on the heels of the feeding of the five thousand but it was the miracle of Jesus walking on the water that convinced Jesus' disciples that he was indeed the Son of God. The story unfolds on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had suggested the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side while he prayed alone, but they were not able to cross with the storm battering their boat. They were terrified and were reassured only when Jesus walked to them across the water, pulling Peter out of the water on the way. When Jesus got into the boat the wind ceased.

The story demonstrates that Jesus is Lord of the wind and sea, and also compassionate in serving others. It helps establish the identity of Jesus. This is the first time Jesus is called the Son of God by the disciples, a statement that builds on what they had said earlier about him: "Whatever kind of man is this? Even the winds and the sea obey him" Here they answer their own question: "Truly you are the Son of God."

Jesus is shown to be compassionate and merciful in today's Gospel, but he also has the power to defy the laws of nature. Sometimes turbulent places are also "thin places," where God breaks thru. It is the nature of faith to be willing to throw oneself into a disorderly world and hope to encounter Jesus there. And, as Peter discovered Jesus extends life-giving stability amidst chaos and danger. He has compassion for the people fearing for their lives. The story prompts reflection about who Jesus is and about the nature of faith. Just as Jesus puts out his hand and holds Peter, he can also grasp us by the hand when we sink into our own seas of worries at times. Often we fear the difficult experiences of life such as illness, loss of loved ones, and financial hardships, only to discover that these experiences can bring Jesus closer to us. It is our mission to reach out to others who are suffering and fearful, just as Jesus did.

Your friend in Jesus
Msgr. Zach