Homily: 12th Sunday Ordinary Time (yr. B, 2024)

We often hear bad weather - like a severe rainstorm, a tornado or hurricane - referred to as an Act of GOD. This isn’t necessarily expressing Faith as much as it’s acknowledging that these forces are beyond human control. So, if a force is beyond human control; then whatever CAN control it, is beyond human. The Disciples, realizing this quite well, ask an important question that will have repercussions right up to today. WHO then is this, WHOM even wind and sea obey? In the Book of Job, GOD claimed authority over nature and specifically the sea, when HE said; thus far shall you come but no farther and here shall your proud waves be stilled! In the Gospel, JESUS echoes that command to the wind and sea: Quiet, be still! The Disciples, schooled in Scripture since childhood, surely saw the similarity; hence, their question. In 325 at the Council of Nicea; the Church, confronting the same question; WHO then is This? Answered officially and dogmatically; The FATHER and the SON are of the same Divine Substance and are therefore; equal. Whatever you say of the FATHER can be said of the SON and vice versa. So, for the Christian, there’s no doubt as to WHO this is. In the Book of Job, satan claims that Job’s Faith is shallow. He was faithful to GOD only because everything had gone well in his life. If things changed; like if Job had storms or trials in his life, he would surely abandon his Faith in GOD. So, GOD permitted Job to be tested with grave hardships and severe suffering. And there’s something to be said about that. Haven’t we all known people, who, in fact, have become angry with GOD and have left the church because of some suffering they couldn’t understand. But Job; though deeply troubled; chooses to remain Faithful to GOD. He has no idea why things in his life turned out so horrible, and he’s angry about it, but he also understands his need for GOD. Job comes to realize that order is born out of chaos because of GOD, that GOD is in charge of the cosmos, and its forces have boundaries set for them by GOD. This is a GOD Job can trust. The author of the Gospel of Mark sees a parallel between Job and the early church. The boat in the Gospel is an image of the Church, which is often referred to as; “the bark of Peter.” The Christians who first heard this Gospel were being persecuted by Nero in Rome and were outcasts from society in Jerusalem. They lived in constant fear and danger. It must have seemed like GOD was asleep in their boat. Yet, like Job, most of them didn’t abandon their Faith. This narrative is the first of six crossings that Mark describes in his Gospel; and they are much more than geographical excursions. JESUS has been teaching on the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee; and on the other side is the Decapolis, a predominately Gentile territory. This nighttime boat trip is going to cross much more than water; it will be a boundary crossing into the new and unknown deep of JESUS’S mission to the Gentiles. But before the pagan shore is reached; there’s also the boundary between fear and faith to be crossed, a boundary that’s a challenge to disciples of all times- and there’s no question, this is often a rough crossing. The struggle between fear and faith will be a constant theme in Mark’s Gospel. And isn’t that a constant theme in our lives as well? The scholars tell us, this Gospel can also be an image of our own personal spiritual journey. Don’t we sometimes feel like we’re riding the waves of some stormy sea? Doesn’t it seem in those times that JESUS is asleep in our boat? Scripture however uses untroubled sleep as an image of absolute confidence and trust in GOD. In the Book of Psalms for instance, those who rest undisturbed, are those who have placed their trust entirely in GOD. Our Psalm for today reminds us that we believe in a GOD of rescue, a GOD WHO sees people in distress and listens to their pleas. JESUS slept well through the storm because of HIS unwavering Faith and Trust in the FATHER. The frightened Disciples on the other hand are showing a lack of such trust; TEACHER, do you not care that we are perishing? Christian Discipleship is NOT a life without storms, but as Disciples we are assured that JESUS is with us in those storms, even when HE seems to be asleep. If the violent weather of a storm is an Act of GOD, HIS Presence with us at such times is also an Act of GOD. By calming the storm, JESUS shows HIS Power over creation, HE Reveals HIS Divinity. The SON of GOD can calm the chaos; including any chaos in our lives. The question facing the disciples, as well as ourselves is; will we trust JESUS to do so? Speaking of this Gospel, one author writes; Today’s Gospel can be summed up in one profound line: JESUS is Present in the storm. From the literal storm on the sea to the storms in our lives, JESUS never leaves us to face our trials and tribulations alone. We are also told the Disciples were filled with great awe. Their awe comes not necessarily from the power of our natural world, but from the peace to which it’s transformed in response to JESUS’S Word. They are filled with awe at the control HE displayed; At HIS Command the sea obeyed, and peace and calm immediately followed. Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have Faith? These questions of JESUS are not so much a rebuke as it is a way of teaching them how to cross over from fear to Faith. The Disciples have addressed HIM as TEACHER when they cry out to HIM and the Evangelist Mark portrays this as a teachable moment. As GOD does with Job; JESUS doesn’t explain away the Disciple’s fear; but redirects them toward the GOD WHO is in control at the center of Creation. JESUS leads them through their fear, and points to HIS power in the Stilling of the storm; and not just that storm, but every storm that comes up in their lives as well as our own. In times of crisis, in times of loss or pain, when hope seems to be lost, may we remember that CHRIST sailed into the dark center of a storm and out again, leaving a Peace no one could explain. HE still does that today. Although HE doesn’t always prevent the storms, that doesn’t mean HE has abandoned us. Our Faith and Trust in HIM will empower us to never doubt HE is with us, and HE will get us through it, better and stronger than we were before. As the popular hymn, Amazing Grace says so well; through many dangers, toils and snares I have already come; tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home. Today, we see the GOD of the Hebrew Scriptures and JESUS of the Christian Scriptures exercising the same kind of power. They exercise the same kind of power because they ARE the same. JESUS Proclaims in the Gospel of John: Whoever has seen ME has seen the FATHER. This narrative of the storm at sea, answers the question WHO is this man? It’s JESUS the DIVINE SON of GOD, again, equal to the FATHER in all things. How do we know this? HE didn’t invoke the Power of GOD before HE acted; HE simply rebuked the wind and said to the sea; Quiet! Be still! HIS Authority over the storm reveals HIM as LORD of Creation and reminds us of the DIVINE Authority over the chaotic waters as described in the Book of Genesis; and also, when the waters were divided allowing the people to pass through them from slavery into freedom during the Exodus. With eyes of Faith, may we always recognize the Power of GOD at work in our lives - in the calmness, in the chaos, in the unexpected, good things, as well as in the unexpected bad things. Several of the Disciples were seasoned fishermen. They knew that sea quite well, they should have been prepared for its fury. They also knew JESUS; but now they see HIM through the light of Faith - as ONE who calms the wind and stills the sea. Like those first Disciples, we are often terrified by the storms of life. May we allow JESUS to calm our fears and protect us from all that threatens to overwhelm us. Isn’t it true, everything is ultimately in GOD’S Hands? So, because everything is ultimately in HIS Hands, because HE is with us in the midst of any and all storms of life and ultimately is in control of any chaos that may threaten us, may we always entrust ourselves to this Powerful, Loving GOD WHO cares if even a sparrow falls to the ground.