

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 12th SUNDAY (B)

Job: 38: 1-4, 8-11 Psalm 107 2 Cor. 5: 14-17 Mark 4: 35-41

By: Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

We have returned to Ordinary Time and today's gospel is taken from a broader context. Our selection for today begins, "On that day..." – which day is that? Today's passage concludes chapter four, which consists of a series of parables: Jesus addressed the first to a large crowd (4: 1-9) and then several more to his disciples. At the end of his teaching Jesus invites his disciples into the boat to "cross to the other side." In the boat they encounter the violent squall. Though we don't hear a series of parables or formal instruction, nevertheless Jesus is still instructing his disciples. The teaching has taken another form. They will learn about Jesus' power as he saves them from destruction.

In Mark's gospel Jesus is always on the go and today, as he does throughout this gospel, he invites his disciples to follow him, "Let us cross to the other side." Jesus always seems attracted by what lies ahead, just over the horizon. He wasn't a stay-at-home person. He saw up ahead new possibilities and more people who needed to hear his message and experience his power.

There is something very attractive to a church community when it gets established, runs smoothly and has things in order. But being "established" and having a smooth operation, can also indicate a sedentary church; happy with the status quo; getting along with the surrounding world; unwilling to take prophetic stands on issues national and local that might rock the boat.

Let's not rock the boat, if we do, who will help us? It is quite clear that the early church faced many turbulent storms in its first days, conflicts because of its religious roots in Judaism and suppression by the Roman government that saw it as a threat to its "Pax Romana" – the law and order of the Empire. The first disciples could have been prudent, kept their new-found faith to themselves and stayed out of trouble. But they followed the One who was always inviting them to get up and move to the next challenge. That's what Jesus does today, he gets up to move and invites those he has been teaching, "Let us cross to the other side." For those of us in ministry it seems just as we settle in and have gotten the hang of it, we are asked to make changes and move on. Or, for us in the pews, just as we have gotten used

to changes in our parish community another group moves in and we have to adapt one more time.

The invitation to go across “to the other side,” could mean a lot of different things for each of us who hear it. As a church “the other side” could mean paying attention to those not presently part of our community or who are on “the other side,” in some way: the less respectable; the newly arrived immigrant; those “over the hill” – the elderly, infirmed and dying; the displaced by war now living in refugee camps, etc.

A devout Catholic college student told me recently he took an elective course on Islam, and it has changed his view of Muslims. His teacher had coffee with several students each week after class and my young friend said, “My teacher is a devout Muslim, and I have learned from his example to study and take my own faith more seriously.” “Let us cross to the other side” – Jesus hasn’t stopped inviting us to leave behind the comfortable, get in the boat and move on. Should we encounter any storms along the way, he will be there with us; even though he sometimes seems asleep!

Which is a detail in the story we can’t dismiss too easily! When our trials are severe, as they are these days for the Church, we might want to demand of Christ, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” I write this a couple days after the revelations that, for over fifty years, children in Irish orphanages and residential schools were abused and their plight was ignored or covered up by religious superiors of the orders who ran the schools and the local hierarchy. I want to ask, with the disciples in the storm-tossed boat, “Teacher, don’t you care that we are perishing?”

Christians who cross to the other side feel the storm and threats from exterior forces too. A church group bought a small apartment house, fixed it up for low-income families but, when the locals found out, there was an uproar of protest. The church people were confronted by screaming and cursing neighbors. “A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat....” Some of the protestors were of the same churches as those who bought and rehabilitated the apartments. We followers of Jesus, who are on the move with him, making the crossing to new places and ways, can meet storms from within and without that can shatter or severely test our faith.

So, let's not be too quick to criticize the frightened disciples in the boat with Jesus. I think I would have asked him questions similar to the ones asked by those disciples. I would begin my questioning in a similar way, "Don't you care....?"

It turns out that, though the disciples were shrill with panic, Jesus didn't feel their panic, even though he was in the same circumstances as they. He was not afraid. The developed nations of the world stockpile nuclear weapons because we are afraid and claim we want security. More and more people carry guns or keep them in their homes out of fear. We reject the stranger we don't know and put up barriers to protect ourselves from their entering our communities. We are afraid.

Jesus spoke a word of rebuke to the wind and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" Mark tells us "the wind ceased and there was a great calm." I don't know the answers to the world's fears and storms. But I do feel challenged to turn to Christ, who does care for God's storm-tossed children and ask him to speak a word of calm. We need to pray for a universal calm at today's Eucharist; the calm that only God can evoke – in our lives and the life of our world.

In their distress, the disciples call Jesus, "Teacher." And so, he is. Perhaps, in the midst of our storms, he is already speaking a healing word to a wounded church and a calming word to the agitated peoples of the world. We just may have to practice better listening; stop listening and following the shouting, stormy voices around us and take God's Word more to heart and mind. Listen – Jesus is speaking right now in the mist of the storms we face. "Quiet! Be still!" Can you hear him?

As I fly I see people in airplanes with those thick noise-cancelling earphones. They are supposed to suppress the droning sound of the plane's engines and give people a more relaxed and peaceful flight. Some even play gentle music or reproduce the sounds of the ocean or birds in a meadow. (Sounds good to me!) The world, even on an ordinary day, is so frenetic and noisy and these people are searching for a few moments of calm in their rushed lives. Whatever methods we use, we all should find a way to shut out the usual din and competing voices around us and listen for a word from Christ that will calm and direct us through our storms.

One last storm we must face, and it is a big one, beyond any power we have to calm it. It is death. Each of us will face it; death may come roaring in on us or arrive by another path, little by little. But come it will, a unique "violent squall" with its own unsettling "waves" that will attempt to swamp us. We face that and

other scary moments of our lives with the faith evoked again by this gospel passage. Jesus does care and will not let our fright overcome us. We trust that, when we need, he will speak words to rebuke the encroaching waves, “Quiet! Be still!”

Mark tells us that Jesus “woke up.” I wonder if the evangelist isn’t hinting at more than Jesus’ rising from a nap? Is he suggesting Jesus’ rising from his own personal storm at sea – his death? Because of Jesus’ rising, we too will rise from our sleep at his word; his word can overcome even death. Assured by our faith in his power over death we have great hope and, despite any storm we face, we can experience the calm only he can give in the storms of our lives.

QUOTABLE

(This is a poem written by 11-year-old Katherine Erickson of Immaculate Conception Parish in Durham, NC. The poem won 4th place in the North Carolina Catholic Daughters’ Poetry Contest.)

Katherine’s email is: Kapnannie@gmail.com)

God’s Gifts in My Life

God gave us many things
Like the forest and the springs
And the mountains and our dreams
So we pray our thanks to God.

Thank you for the soggy rain
Thank you for no hurtful pain
Now everyone should shout together
We love ourselves and each other.

FAITH BOOK

*Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run.
“Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins
people take home.*

From today’s Gospel reading:

The disciples woke Jesus and said to him,

“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?”
He woke up, rebuked the wind and said to the sea,
“Quite! Be still!”
The wind ceased and there was a great calm.

Reflection:

There is much that affects our church these days: scandal on the inside and rejection and persecution from the outside. With the disciples we are tempted to ask Jesus, “Don’t you care....?” Today’s gospel directs us to turn to Christ, who cares for God’s storm-tossed children and ask him to speak a word of calm over the powerful forces that distress us – ““Quiet! Be still!”

So, we ask ourselves:

- What turbulent forces in my life frighten me and test my faith?
- Have I invited Jesus to speak a word that will give me courage and inner calm?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Let us cross to the other side.’”

1.

(Mark 4:35)

To be engaged in the works of justice and charity, we must “cross to the other side”. Just as in today’s Gospel, that crossing will most likely bring “storms” to our sense of equilibrium and contentment. Few of us can sit down to a full meal with the same sense of entitlement when we have “crossed to the other side” and know those who are truly hungry. Few of us can feel the same right to unchallenged ownership in our own homes when we have “crossed to the other side” and know those who are homeless. Few of us have such stony hearts that we can take our freedom for granted when we have “crossed to the other side” and know those who are incarcerated or held prisoner by illness or addiction. “To cross to the other side” is to risk having our hearts broken and to look with renewed and humble gratitude at the abundance of our own lives. It is into our “broken hearts” that God comes with compassion and grace. The “storm” which engulfs us in the face of poverty and injustice is calmed by the same words which Jesus uttered in that other storm: “Peace, be still”. In that stillness, we can learn what God is asking us to do. We can hold the pain and know we are beloved sons and daughters, and we can risk whatever actions it will take to help others know that they are as well.

Did you know?

§ “The sense of vulnerability we experience when we step across the boundaries of class, culture, ethnicity or even familiarity, is a valuable reminder that we are crossing into other people’s lives.”

§ “Like Moses before the burning bush, we are standing on holy ground. We are crossing a threshold, moving away from our normal frame of reference and out to our margins, where new relationships, fresh perspectives, and transformation await us.”

§ “It is precisely at such times and on such shaky ground that we can become available and open to the transforming presence of God’s Spirit, working itself into our hearts, reaching in to rearrange our lives. In some cases it can even cause us to rearrange our life priorities.”

(http://www.justfaith.org/Attachments/NewsletterPDFs/JF_Fall2005.pdf)

What can I do?

Pray for courage and wisdom to “cross to the other side”.

Join one of Sacred Heart’s many outreach ministries.

Go to the *JustFaith* link above to read more about “Border Crossing” experiences.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates’ names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina’s, “*People of Faith Against the Death Penalty*” If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Angel Guevara #0506556 (On death row since 6/20/96)
- David K. Williams #0440399 (7/23/96)
- Walic C. Thomas #0405380 (8/9/96)

---Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

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