

19 Sunday A

August 9, 2020

St. Patrick

Theme: With a *little* faith, we can keep our focus on *him*, on Jesus.

“Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught (the sinking) Peter, saying to him, ‘O you of little faith...’”

“O you of little faith”: At least Jesus said Peter had a **“little faith.”** That’s a lot better than having *no* faith. Most of us, I suggest, would admit that we don’t have *a lot of* faith. Like Simon Peter, we have a **“little faith”**—not much, but some.

St. Patrick’s: we’re all in the same boat. It’s one of the images of the church. And the storm has come and tosses the boat in chaos. Like in the Gospel story, **“the wind was against them.”** It’s against us on several fronts. We’re fatigued by Covid-19, and the constant precautions against an unseen plague. There’s further chaos within our nation with chronic political turmoil. And, yes, **“the wind has long been against”** persons of color in our country, and we can no longer avoid systemic racism within our church and nation.

In these real storms **“the wind is against us,”** and we can’t get to the shore. Some of us bail out, becoming paralyzed by fear. Some give pep talks—sugar-coating the storm as not so bad. But none of these options truly get us to shore and safety.

In the Bible only God can walk on the waves. That’s why Jesus identifies himself with the ancient name of God to the petrified disciples. **“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid,”** he keeps reassuring us.

Peter then tests Jesus: **“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”** It started all right, Peter tiptoeing on the water. He kept his focus on Jesus. But then, Peter got unraveled by the forces of the storm. **“He became frightened,”** as the Gospel puts it, and he began to sink. Fear paralyzes, and he lost his focus on Jesus. Oh yes, Peter didn’t have a lot of faith; he had a **“little faith.”** Jesus takes him by the hand— to face the fear, and to take the next steps.

Every year I make an eight-day retreat according to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. Many years ago one of my retreat directors, Sister Ruth Cowie, counseled me as I was wrestling in vain to resolve a conflict within myself. She said: *“In prayer, keep the focus on Jesus, rather than trying to get clarity on your problem. In prayer, to the extent that we focus on Jesus, then there follows inner clarity.”*

In our journey together: *Are we keeping our focus on Jesus, or are we shaken by the storm, and find ourselves sinking?* Oh, Friends, we’ve got just **“a little faith.”** With that, however, in the midst of our chaos and everything-out-of-kilter, we’re called to keep the focus on Jesus.

This Sunday I can’t let another storm from seventy-five years ago pass by in silence. Seventy-five years ago *today*, an atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. That city was the center of Catholicism in Japan, and the bomber used the steeple of the Catholic cathedral in Nagasaki as the target. Three days earlier, Hiroshima was annihilated by the first atomic bomb. Immediately after each bombing, Pope Pius XII publicly and passionately condemned the use of the atomic bomb and its target of a population center, as has every pope, including Pope Francis, who visited the two cities two years ago. Since 1945, nuclear war has not been waged. Japan initiated that war with its attack on Pearl Harbor. From our vantage point as disciples, *we* cannot choose to kill indiscriminately children, the infirm, and the vulnerable as was done at Nagasaki. We, and the rest of the world, cannot choose to cross the line again and wage nuclear war.

St. Patrick’s: We’re called to keep our focus on Jesus, and his nonviolent embrace of the cross. A different storm in our day, may we keep our focus on Jesus, especially when we’re shaken and find ourselves sinking.

Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand to the sinking Peter. And to us, Jesus again says: **“Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid.”**

General Intercessions

August 9, 2020

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Strengthen us, your church, as the Risen Jesus takes us by the hand in the midst of our storms and shores up our little faith; we pray to you, O Lord—

Heal victims of war, and unite nations in efforts to end the nuclear arms race, systemic racism, and other atrocities; we pray to you, O Lord—

In the midst of the pandemic, give healing to those with the coronavirus; give renewed dedication to medical caregivers and first responders; give courage to leaders; and give hope to us all; we pray to you, O Lord—

Comfort those caught in the storms of drug addiction, of mental illness, and of other ailments; we pray to you, O Lord—

Embrace with your peace and light all who have died, especially Joel Weirich, and all those who have died from Covid-19; we pray to you, O Lord—

