

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Today's Gospel follows right on the heels of last week's where Jesus was teaching the people using parables and, in private, explaining the parables to the disciples. Jesus' fame had already spread far and wide because of all the amazing things that He had been doing, and His disciples were witnesses to many signs — signs of healing and casting out demons and so forth. They probably heard the demons say of Jesus, "*You are the Son of God*" (Mark 3:11). And in today's Gospel, they witnessed Jesus' authority over wind and wave. Surely by now the disciples were coming to realize just whom they were following.

To re-set the narrative, this happens as Jesus and His disciples were making their way across to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It was evening when they embarked, and, as some of the disciples were experienced fishermen, Jesus left the sailing to them. He lay down in the stern of the boat to get some rest.

But a violent windstorm blew up and caused large waves to crash against the boat and fill it. The disciples became concerned for their lives, but Jesus slept on. Though this was a perilous time, their boat being buffeted about by wind and wave, He slept calmly with His head on a pillow.

The disciples roused Him from sleep pleading for His help, scolding Him a bit also for His apparent lack of concern. "*[D]o you not care that we are perishing?*" Actually, translating that way makes it sound more accusatory than it was. It's better to translate it: "*You do care that we are perishing, don't you?*" expecting an affirmative answer from Jesus. You see, they had to have had some understanding of who Jesus was — why else would they have come to Him? After all, He wasn't a fisherman; He was a carpenter (Mark 6:3). What did they expect Him to do?

Well, they had witnessed Jesus doing marvelous signs. He healed people of many diseases, though He was not trained as a doctor. He taught — He taught with authority — though He had not studied as a disciple of any rabbi. "We're not sure what, but He can do something," they must have thought.

And they were right. He rebuked the wind and calmed the seas, and the disciples marveled at it: "*Who ... is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*"

Surely, the answer was as obvious to them as it is to us. Jesus is the Lord God Almighty; He is the maker of all things; He is the One who was there laying the foundations of the world, measuring its dimensions, and setting its cornerstone and the limits on the sea. Now, this is actually a natural revelation way of recognizing God, as Paul taught, "*in the things that have been made*" (Rom 1:20), that is, in the creation. To be sure, the Bible gives us a special revelation of God as creator, but no one has an excuse for not recognizing God in the creation. And for the disciples,

there was no excuse that they did not get down on their knees in homage to Jesus who displayed this “*eternal power and divine nature*” (Rom. 1:20) by “*the breath of his mouth*” (Ps. 33:6). For who can do such a thing? Who is able to hear the disciples’ cries “*in their trouble*” and deliver “*them from their distress*”? The Lord God Himself can, He who makes “*the storm be still, and the waves of the sea ... hushed*” (Ps. 107:28-29) as the Psalmist writes.

Indeed, I wonder: could that have been the reason for the windstorm and the disciples’ plight, that by recognizing Jesus for who He is, the disciples’ fear of perishing might be turned into the fear of God? That their faith in Jesus might be strengthened? Doesn’t God build us up under our own suffering, even though we admit, “It’s hard; it’s not pleasant; we’d rather not go through it”? Isn’t that Scriptural? Doesn’t Paul say, “*we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*” (Rom. 5:3-5) — faith in our hearts is strengthened as we suffer? Again, the writer to the Hebrews says, God “*disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (Heb. 12:10-11).

I know that’s often not how this text gets applied, but in the Gospel, some details suggest this could be happening, after all, remember: Scripture says: “*The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts*” (1 Sam. 2:7). It wouldn’t be out of bounds to suggest, then, that the Lord Himself brought down this windstorm upon the disciples. After all, the Psalmist reminds us that the Lord is not only the One who stills storms and hushes the waves, but He is also the One who “*command[s] and raise[s] the stormy wind, which lift[s] up the waves of the sea*” (Ps. 107:25).

Second, recall, “*other boats were with him.*” Now, I know it’s an argument from silence, but what of these other boats when the windstorm came down upon the sea? Mark is silent about them, but there’s also no indication that the wind and waves were affecting them at all.

Third, Jesus Himself turns to the disciples’ fear and faith in His stern rebuke of them. “*Why are you so [cowardly]? Have you still no faith?*” This is why Jesus did signs and miracles — for the sake of our faith. The Evangelist John says that’s why he recorded them — “*that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name*” (John 20:31).

Fourth, the Evangelist Mark makes a distinction between the disciples’ cowardice (δειλοί ἐστε) and their fearing greatly (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον μέγαν) and their saying to

themselves, “*Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?*” Two different Greek words here. The disciples acted cowardly as they faced the prospect of death, but the great fear welled up in them after the danger from the storm had passed, at the realization that they were in the presence of the Almighty God.

To be sure, the disciples would continue to struggle with their faith and understanding until after Jesus’ resurrection, but I suggest that here they did recognize Jesus as Divine, and that’s why they were “*filled with great fear*” at the end. In fact, perhaps their question “*Who ... is this?*” was just rhetorical — they weren’t really looking for an answer, for the answer was clear.

And their fear? I don’t think we need to soften the force of the phrase as the RSV does, saying that they were merely “*filled with awe.*” Isaiah’s vision teaches us how poor sinners fear in the presence of a Holy God: “*Woe is me!*” he cried, “*For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!*” (Is. 6:5) Great fear seems right also in our Gospel, motivated by the fact that “[n]o one [had] ever seen God” (John 1:18), not with unveiled face, motivated by the disciples’ knowledge that the Lord had told Moses, “*you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live*” (Ex. 33:20). And yet, here they were before God’s own Son, true God Himself, and they were still standing and living.

However, in this fear, they may not yet have come to realize that Jesus was, in fact, how their God was for them, not against them, that He came to save them and not destroy them or condemn them (John 3:16-17), even as St. Paul proclaims to us: “*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us*” (Rom. 8:31-34). God is with us, God is for us, in Jesus.

Paul then goes on to ask, “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?*” And he answers, “*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:35, 37-39). God is with us, God is for us, in Jesus.

Dear fellow believers in Christ, Jesus is the powerful God who, with the Father and the Spirit, created heaven and earth and preserves us within it. Jesus demonstrated it calming winds and quieting waves — therefore, we fear Him. But

Jesus is also the Son sent in love into our flesh, who loves us and cares for us, who sacrificed Himself for us — therefore, we love Him. Let us also trust in Him above all things. Let us hope in Him, for He remains our God with us. Jesus is God for us.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.