

Homily for August 11, 2002
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

By Father Charles Bowes

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13
Romans 9:1-5
Matthew 14:22-33

Salvation is easier than we think – our loss of faith does not keep God from saving us in Jesus Christ.

This same story of Jesus walking on the water appears also in chapter 6 of Saint Mark's gospel and of Saint John's gospel – but minus the episode with Peter and the issue of Peter's faith or lack of it. Saint Matthew here has de-emphasized the nature miracle and uses instead liturgical language from his community: "Save, Lord" – that's an expression which would be used as an acclamation in public prayer. Saint Matthew's text can be read as a picture of his own community, whose numbers, battered by threatening forces and persecutions, continue to call out to the risen Lord for rescue. Despite their lack of faith, the Lord is still present and active in their midst. In other words, salvation is easier than we think – it's more readily available than we realize. And it is through Jesus that the Father's strength can reach us no matter what.

For me, when I hear this gospel and hear of Peter walking on the water and sinking and Jesus saving him, I come away with the thought, "I won't sink if I believe." In other words, I have a sense that I need to achieve my salvation through more faith. But the point of the story is that our faith will always be inadequate – as the folks in Saint Matthew's community discovered in the face of their persecution. They all sank. We all sink in our struggles every time we get out of the boat and have to walk on water – which is exactly how it feels with a lot of the stuff with which we have to deal: family problems, job issues, taxes and finances, school and relationships. Our faith is just never enough, and we always cry out, "Lord, save me."

And the point is that Jesus' faith is enough – Jesus' humanity, which we share, is our point of contact with God's energy. There is God's energy within and throughout the chaos we cannot handle. And our link, our rescue in that chaos, is Jesus Christ – specifically, it is our human terror and fear that is the avenue we share with Jesus. It is through Jesus that the Father's strength can reach us – always and everywhere.

Oddly enough, whenever I hear this story about Peter sinking, I'm drawn to the story of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. He had a similar experience of sinking, out of which I ask these questions: "Lord, what

was it like to be in that garden and to see nowhere else to go but to your death?" Or, "Lord, what was it like to have to choose to stay or to leave?" You see, Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, had to decide whether to leave or to go back and face his accusers. And it was in that struggle that he prayed for the cup to pass from him, and not his will but God's be done.

"Lord, what was it like for you to be on that cross?" Remember the prayer Jesus prayed on that cross which our tradition gives us: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Isn't that the equivalent of Peter's prayer as he sank: "Lord, save me?"

And we know how it all turned out – how the story has been played out: Jesus has risen and his faith is enough to save us always, because he shares the very same humanity as we.

We are all going to get out of the boat and we're all going to sink in this enterprise we call life, which is the equivalent of walking on water. But we can ask a simple question of Jesus and invite God's strength to be ours – Lord, how did you handle the chaos in your life? And in the silence and powerlessness wherein we wait for an answer, God draws near – that's our faith.

Let us pray: Lord, save us! As we notice how strong the wind is, and as we become frightened, speak to our hearts, and strengthen our faith through Christ our Lord. Amen

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