

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson

Sunday 20th June 2021 - 12th Sunday in ordinary time

Readings (Year B): 1st: Job 38:1. 8-11. Psalm: 106. 2nd: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17. Gospel: Mark 4:35-41.

All of us who live surrounded as we are by the sea cannot be unaware of the beauty and the glory and the danger of the sea. We know only too well the amount of times the Lifeboats have to be launched to rescue people, and the seabed around our coasts has many wrecked ships.

The Israelites were a race of landlubbers, who were uncomfortable with the sea. Hard for us to understand as an island race, and how Mark calls what we would think of as a lake, the Sea of Galilee or of Tiberias.

In the background of their minds the sea represented the primitive chaos which God had to control before beginning the work of creation in the opening of Genesis.

Today's first reading, the Psalm and the gospel all proclaim the awesome wonder of God's power over the stormy sea.

For the Israelites, storm and sea were manifestations of terrifying power which reminded them of their insignificance. Yet they also believed that God was mightier than these awesome displays of power, and in them, they sensed his incomparability.

In the Old Testament, God alone has the power to subdue the raging seas. The Psalm is a communal hymn of praise for God's deliverance from various types of danger and here affirms God's control of the sea.

That background alone should have convinced the disciples who Jesus was. It was part of their learning process discovering "who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him."

St Augustine said that "this episode at sea signifies the drama of the Christian life. All of God's children embark with Christ on a life that is full of dangerous storms, especially attacks from evil spirits and temptations.

We must learn to trust in Christ daily, since he alone can restrain these forces and bring us to the safe harbour of salvation.”

At Mark’s time of writing the early Church communities found themselves in storms of violent persecution: as do very many Church communities around the world today.

The boat in the story is a place to be with Jesus and close to him. Several of the disciples were used to boats as they were fishermen. We can readily appreciate the image of the ‘Barque of Peter,’ a term for the Church, tossed on the sea of life, at times very shaken, but not going down.

We sing, when we are allowed to (after Covid 19 restrictions are lifted. ed) ;
“Sweet sacrament of rest, Ark from the ocean’s roar, within thy shelter
blest soon may we reach the shore, save us for still the tempest raves, save
lest we sink beneath the waves sweet sacrament of rest.”

And the great seafarers hymn, ‘Eternal Father strong to save, whose arm
doth bind the restless wave.’

We cannot tame the elements, much as modern society would like to.
But we are people of faith, living in a society of great unbelief in God.

Some ask ‘why, if Jesus could calm the storm, why can’t we?’ Nature, the elements we cannot. But, as another hymn has it; “When the storms are o’er us, and dark clouds before us, then its light directeth and our way protecteth.”

The light being the light of Christ, the word of God. Jesus is God. He is the Lord, we are not. He is the source of all life and creation. We are not. Who is this; Jesus our Lord. He is our ruler and guide.

Canon Philip Dyson

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