

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

The Lord Of The Storm.

Just to know that Christ is with us amid all the turbulence of life is a great cause for celebration and thanksgiving. With Christ the turbulence can become the birth pangs of a new creation.

(Readings: Job 3: 1, 8-11. Here your proud waves shall break.

2 Corinthians 5: 14-17. Now the new creation is here.

Mark 4: 35- 41. Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.)

Our Gospel reading today ends with a question: “Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.” And people have never stopped asking that self-same question, because Jesus has made his indelible mark on the world.

Somewhere today, poems and books are being written about him. Numerous images of him are being carved in wood and stone. Untold numbers of paintings, and church stained-glass windows depict various artistic impressions of him. Somewhere, a sad and broken life is being restored in Jesus’ name. Somewhere, a cargo of food is being shipped to some drought-ravaged or war-torn part of the world, in Jesus’ name. Men and women with life-saving medical knowhow are ministering essential care and treatment to pandemic-stricken areas of the third world, in Jesus’ name.

Who *can* this be?

He is the one we turn to in times of crisis. When the bottom falls out of life, and all seems to be lost, it is *his* assurance that we seek. This is the real meaning of today’s Gospel.

St Mark was writing to a persecuted Church. The followers of Jesus were paying dearly for their faith. Many of them were anathematised and expelled from their synagogue. Some had even been put to death for refusing to worship the emperor. They were, in a sense, like sailors trying to cross a stormy sea in a small open boat. Their very survival seemed in doubt.

Mark recalled this event to remind them – *and us* – of three great truths. Firstly, that in times of crisis, we are never alone. Jesus is always with us, as he was with his disciples when the storm came crashing down upon them. Admittedly, that didn’t seem to make much difference to the disciples, at least nor for a while, but the fact remained, he was there with them in their danger. And the Church needed to know, that Christ hadn’t abandoned them in their time of need. Though the storms were raging, he was with them in the boat, then, just as he is with us now, in the Church, today.

It may seem strange to find Jesus in the middle of a crisis. We are more inclined to look for him in some quiet harbour, far removed from howling winds and roaring waves. Isn’t this one reason why we come to Church, to escape a sordid, ugly world, and refresh our souls with quietness and beauty? We all need that experience, from time to time.

But if we are looking for Jesus, then a storm is, actually, a reasonably good place to begin the search, since our Lord is right at home in the midst of all manner of chaos. He was born in a lowly stable. He grew up in a village with a poor reputation. He spent much of his time with people who were spiritually, morally, or physically sick. And he died a pitiful, horrid death, in agony, surrounded by a murderous, blood-thirsty crowd.

Neither you, nor I, will ever encounter a fearful experience that's unfamiliar to him. He has seen it all, right down to the very bottom of that proverbial black hole, where it feels that even God himself has forsaken us. Jesus knows all about storms, both literal and figurative. That is why we can trust him, because he has been there before, and he will be there again, and this time with us.

The second thing Mark tells us is that, in times of crisis Jesus cares. His disciples had grave doubts about that. With rising panic in their voices, they cried, "Master, do you not care? We are going down!" And who could blame them for asking that question? We would have asked it ourselves if we had been there.

When the storms of life threaten our security, our sanity, our very existence, it is not easy to sustain trust in divine providence. As we watch the world lurching from one crisis to another, including the one we are all in right now, we cannot help but wonder if God really cares about anything. But then again, how could we ever question God's care for us knowing that he sent his only Son into the world, to die on a cross to save us? Our faith tells us he really does care.

In today's Gospel Jesus accuses his apostles of having no faith, for if they had had sufficient faith, they would not have been so frightened.

Thirdly, Mark reminds us that in times of crisis, Jesus is above the storm. At his command, 'The wind dropped, and all was calm again.' Jesus is presented as being not only in the storm, but more powerful than the storm. This is the essential truth that Mark shared with the persecuted Church. He reminded them that their fate would not be determined by any secular Empire.

'Who can this be?'

He is the same one who caused the blind to see, and the lame to walk; the one who spoke a word of forgiveness that transformed a prostitute into a saint; the same one who conquered death and the grave for ever.

In times of crisis, when all hope seems to be lost, above all else, let us remember that Jesus is with us in the dark centre of all our storms. He truly does care for us! So, in faith, we can trust him. We can trust him to bring us safely through any storm, including Covid, to lead us to calm waters, and into a safe harbour.