

19th Sunday in Ord. Time -- Aug. 8-9, 2020

Last Sunday in the Gospel story of the miracle of the feeding of the multitude, we, along with the disciples, received a strong command from the Lord not to send those in need away to fend for themselves, but to do something for them ourselves.

We, like the disciples, know that it is impossible for us on our own to do all that the Lord commands.

However, do we have the courage to step out in faith and begin doing what the Lord commands --- trusting that the Lord will be working through us to somehow bring it to completion?

Today's readings pick up on these concerns that may be lingering with us since last Sunday and they assure that we will be able to do whatever the Lord commands and that his presence will remain with us to see us through whatever he asks us to do.

With regard to today's Gospel --- if you had asked Peter the day before he walked on water, "Can you walk on water?", Peter would have answered "No." Peter could not walk on water unless Jesus told him to, but Peter obeyed Jesus' command and was able to do so. This is a basic principle of Christian life. Whatever Jesus commands, he will enable us to do.

For example, we are told to love our enemies and forgive them 70 x 7. We cannot do these things. However, because Jesus has commanded us to do them, we can and must do them. Jesus has commanded us to "make disciples of all the nations" and to become holy in every way. Of course, we cannot do these things. But because Jesus has commanded us, we can. Life in Christ is the exciting privilege of living far beyond our human limitations because of Jesus' commands and our obedience.

Nevertheless, the situations in which we find ourselves personally or as a church or community can be quite frightening and are even more so as the Lord commands or asks us personally to do something about them. This fearfulness is something that is also addressed in today's readings.

In today's first reading, we find the prophet Elijah running away from the community to which he had been sent because of threats against his life.

In the second reading, Paul is deep in sorrow and anguish about the failure of his fellow Israelites to recognize God's presence in Jesus. In the Gospel, the disciples are in great fear as they try to cross the Sea of Galilee and are caught in a major storm.

All of them are having a difficult time seeing or recognizing God's presence with them which would have given them the confidence and courage they needed to deal with their situations.

We tend to look for the presence of God in big, powerful things that we cannot control. That is why we call them "acts of God" --- hurricanes, floods, fires, earthquakes, storms, etc. These acts of God, so called, can also be found in quieter and more personal manifestations such as injuries, illness, loss, divorce, financial failures which can be equally devastating for us. Elijah learns in experience that God is not always or merely in the grand events where we expect God's power is being expressed. Acts of God are also tiny, gentle things like a tiny whispering sound, sunshine after a cloudy day, and unexpected word of encouragement, etc. Where have we encountered God "passing by" so far even today? --- In my own life -- the more that I try to notice and be grateful for blessings in my life, the more I realize that is always with me.

Paul is in anguish over the failures of the Israelite people, yet Paul, remembering all of God's gifts to them, is convinced that God has not removed Israel's privileges and that there is yet hope of God's compassion for them.

Peter and the disciples are frightened in the storm. They see Jesus but think that he is a ghost, but Peter asks the Jesus to confirm his identity for them by asking him to come to him on the water. However, as soon as Peter takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the storm waves he begins to sink. Jesus then saves him and then gets back into the boat with Peter and when

Jesus comes into the boat the storm calms down. -----
---Where Jesus is, --- is where there is peace and grace
to act.

Where are we today? – in the boat or out of the boat?
Is our life wild and threatening or calm and secure?
Either way, where is Jesus? How and where is he
present with us?

If we can experience that Jesus is with us we will have
the power to act on his commands. – How does this all
apply to us?

If they know Christ is with them, parents will show
this faith by not ignoring their children and reaching
out to their needs. Caregivers will be able to overcome
the despair and discouragement of those they are
caring for. Teachers will be able to go beyond the
basics in caring for their students. Leaders in
community will have the faith to truly address the
suffering of the needy in the world.

In all of this, the Eucharist has a special part to play.
The Eucharist is the great reminder of how God the
Father reached out to help his trusting Son in the time
of his Passion. In the Old Testament God sent daily
manna to the Israelites for 40 years to help them on
their journey through the desert to the promised land.
Now through the Eucharist, God gives the new and true
bread from heaven that we need to journey from this
life into eternal life. In the Eucharist he assures us of
his constant presence and help for us. In Ch. 6 of the
Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that we will not be able
to complete the journey to eternal life unless we eat the
new manna of his flesh and drink his blood in the
sacrament of the Eucharist. A large part of the retreat
I was on was focused on becoming open to recognizing
the Eucharist as the visible presence and assurance of
Christ's presence and love for us. May we ask for and
receive the grace we need to recognize his great
presence and help for us in this and every Mass.

In one of the sessions at the retreat we learned that one
of the Jewish expectations in regard to the promised
Messiah was that when he came he would give them a
new promise land and a new and greater Manna from

heaven to help them reach this new and greater promised land. In this context, then, when we pray the Lord's prayer that Jesus taught us – when we pray for his future kingdom to come, we also pray that he gives us this day, not just ordinary bread but “supernatural bread” – that is the Eucharist, to help us journey into the kingdom and eternal life.

We thank the Lord for all that he commands us to do and for the grace he gives us, especially in the Eucharist, to carry out those commands that are far beyond our human limitations and continue our journey into eternal life.

As we prayed in today's psalm – “Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”