

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time B Cycle June 21, 2015

First Reading: EJob 38:1, 8-11 (*The Lord addressed Job out of the storm*)

Responsorial Psalm 107: "Give thanks to the Lord, God's love is everlasting."

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17 (*Whoever is in Christ is a new creation*)

Gospel: Mark 4:35-41 (*Do you not yet have faith?*)

♪♪ *We walk by faith, and not by sight: No gracious words we hear
Of him who spoke as none e'er spoke, But we believe him near.* ♪♪

Have you ever felt like the disciples in the Gospel, like you were in a storm, and your boat was sinking? Has it ever felt like Jesus was asleep? Have you ever wondered whether Jesus cared?

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Do you not yet have faith?" He asks us the same question. Is he asking if we have faith that God will fix what is wrong with us and with the world? I don't think so. I believe his question is more like "Do you trust me to walk with you through every storm?"

I remember a storm that came in August of 2011. Hurricane Irene blew through the Schoharie Valley and my house near the creek became my house in the creek. I took what I could fit in my car, and drove through almost a foot of water to pick up Sr. Anna. We waited out the flood on higher ground, & when the waters receded, we returned to the double-wide mobile home that had had been our ministry center and my residence since 1995.

It was a real mess. It looked like all my books, clothes, & furniture had been put in a giant blender and sloshed around in 5 ½ feet of water and mud. We prayed, "Lord, what is happening? Are you listening? Does this mean Bethany Ministries will have to start over again, or that you want us to let go of the ministry which called us here?" Our faith was being challenged by the storm.

We were powerless to change what had happened, and when we accepted that fact, we were able - over several months - to let Jesus give us the grace to let go, to pray at a deeper level, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change (like this flood), the courage to change the things I can (like the decisions which we had to make in the moment), and the wisdom to know the difference."

Finally, we realized that the Lord was not going to answer our prayer by fixing the problem the way **we** wanted it fixed, but that he would be present in our lives to get us through whatever we were faced with. As Paul wrote in today's 2nd reading, "*whoever is in Christ is a new creation.*" As he did with his first disciples, He would make of our life a new creation, no matter what storm we had to get through.

We prayed to be able to return to the place that had been flooded but not destroyed, and the Lord answered our prayer - but not the way we thought he would. In early 2014, after 2½ years of living in temporary lodging - I called it "camping" - I accepted the fact that I was not going to be able to go back to where I had lived.

I decided, in my mind, to actively look for another place for our ministry and my residence. Sr. Anna was the only one I told of this decision. Less than 24 hours after I let go of my plan to go back to my place near the creek, Anna's landlord called and asked if she knew anyone who was looking for an apartment. Within two weeks, I was moved in to the apartment underneath the one Sr. Anna lives in. A door had been closed, but a window was opened.

What that experience has taught me, what God continues to say to me out of the storm, is the same truth spoken to Job: *Everything you have is a gift, you cannot hang on to any of it as if it were your absolute possession.* Now when people ask me, "How are you?" I answer, "I am good today!" When they ask me what that means, I say, "Yesterday is gone & tomorrow is God's problem. Today is a gift, that's why it is called the present."

I have also learned what Peter and his terrified friends learned in *their* boat: The Lord will get you through whatever flood threatens your life. He may seem asleep, but he sees and hears the cry of the poor - the prayer of those who admit their need.

Today the earth which is our home is a little like a boat in the midst of a storm of destruction of the land, the water and the atmosphere that sustains all life. Pope Francis released an Encyclical just this past Thursday (June 18, 2015). His message is a call to love and care for the earth & the people who live on it and to trust in the God who created the universe out of love.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of Christ, he is calling us to reestablish the balance between the human race and the environment, and to help persons who are poor to achieve a fuller measure of their dignity. Though based on extensive scientific research, the questions he raises are more moral & pastoral in nature than scientific.

Pope Francis, along with 3 of his predecessors [Paul VI, John Paul II & Benedict XVI], has made it crystal clear that failure to care for the environment affects the poor more than anyone. In this encyclical, Pope Francis challenges all Christians to "*co-operate as instruments of God for the care of creation*". He reminds us to "*realize that our responsibility within creation, and our duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of our faith.*"

Jesus is still capable of calming the storms of racism, environmental devastation and destructive greed, if we allow him to work through us who are the body of Christ on the earth God created.

Pope Francis does not minimize the dangers of climate change, destruction of resources, extinction of species and pollution of the water, air and land, but his focus is on the call to repent of the ways we have contributed to all of this. He challenges the excessive consumption & political paralysis that is putting the very earth which is our home at risk.

He calls us to treat each other and all of creation as sacred. The first words of the Pope's encyclical - *"Laudato Si, mi signore,"* [praised be to you, my Lord]- are the first words of the Great Canticle of Brother Sun composed by St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Francis called all creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister. Pope Francis writes, *"If we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously."*

His message is, at its core, a message of hope. He writes that *"human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning."*

Once we accept the reality of what is happening in nature and among our brothers & sisters, we can begin to change the things we need to change, by living out the values of Jesus and opening our hearts to the power of God's Holy Spirit.

There is a setting of the great prayer of St. Francis that could be a summary of what the the Gospel teaches and Pope Francis is saying in his encyclical. These words, if lived in our day to day lives, have the power to calm the storms that threaten our peace and our lives. They could be our marching orders for the 21st century and a new source of hope for the world and the church.

♪♪ Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good. ♪♪

