

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: Jb 38:1, 8-11; Ps 107; 2Cor 5:14-17; Mk 4:35-41
June 20, 2021
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Eight years ago, when Pope Benedict XVI shocked the world by suddenly announcing that he would resign from the papacy, he referred to the scene that we just heard of in the Gospel, the scene of Christ asleep in the boat with the Apostles, as they were being tossed by the wind and the waves of a violent storm. When Pope Benedict explained the reasons for his resignation, he said,

“It has been a stretch of the Church’s path that has had moments of joy and light, but also difficult moments. I felt like St. Peter and the Apostles in the boat on the Sea of Galilee. The Lord has given us many days of sunshine and light breezes, days when the fishing was plentiful, but also times when the water was rough and the winds against us, just as throughout the whole history of the Church, when the Lord seemed to be sleeping. But I always knew that the Lord is in that boat and I always knew that the boat of the Church is not mine, not ours, but is His. And the Lord will not let it sink. He is the one who steers her This was and is a certainty that nothing can tarnish” (Benedict XVI, February 27, 2013).

We can imagine that Pope Francis must feel the same at times – like Christ is asleep in the boat of the Church, while the boat is being tossed by the waves of a violent storm. In spite of his efforts to reform the Church, Pope Francis has seen more and more evidence of corruption – both financial and spiritual – in the highest levels of the Church: two cardinals have been removed from office, while others have resigned in disgrace. Great divisions within the Church have come to light, especially in Germany, and Catholics continue to be persecuted in parts of the world, such as China and the Middle East. Like probably every pope, Pope Francis has learned the truth of the words once written by St. Boniface: “In her voyage across the ocean of this world, the Church is like a great ship being pounded by the waves of life’s different stresses. Our duty is not to abandon ship but to keep her on her course” (Office of Readings, June 5). It seems that trials and crisis are the norm for the Church, rather than the exception.

The same is often true of our own lives, for all of us who make up the Church. We can often feel like we are caught up in a violent storm, with uncertainty, instability and fear, caused by so many things, such as tension in relationships, temptations, financial pressures, moral dilemmas, or sudden,

unexpected illness and all the changes that come with it. There are so many things in life that can make us feel like we are in a boat being tossed about by the waves and the wind of a terrible storm. And when we turn to God for help in our prayers, it can also feel like God is asleep in the boat, and either doesn't notice how difficult things are for us, or notices and doesn't care.

This is how the Apostles felt in the Gospel when they woke Jesus and said to Him, "*Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?*" And Jesus said to them, "*Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?*" It was as if Jesus was saying to them, "If you believe in me, and if you have me here with you, you don't need to be afraid of anything that is going on around you. It should be enough for you that I am here with you, even if I'm sleeping."

When it seems like Christ is sleeping, He's allowing certain things to happen in our lives, including the trials and the storms of life. Even when we pray about these storms, God does not always intervene to bring them to an end, like He did on the sea in the Gospel. But, if we stay close to Christ, by avoiding sin and accepting and following His teachings, we can have the consolation of knowing that Christ is in the boat with us, even if the boat is being tossed by the waves.

Christ doesn't promise to prevent the storms of life. He doesn't promise to make our sailing smooth and peaceful – not in this life. This is one of the most important and fundamental truths of our faith – Christ did *not* promise that life would be easy and carefree. In fact, He told His disciples, "*In the world you will have trouble*" (Jn 16:33). So, if the storms of life will inevitably come, it's at least better to keep Jesus in the boat with us, by being faithful to Him, rather than leaving Him behind and trying to sail without Him. The presence of Christ in our lives does not keep the storms away, but it does help us get through those storms, with our souls intact. The storms may come at us from all different directions – from family, or work, or the government, or even from within the Church – but we can always choose to keep Christ close to us in our souls, where we can rely on Him for strength to ride out the storm.

And while we ride out the storms of life, hopefully with Christ close to us in the boat of our soul, we can trust that He is accomplishing something in us, to make us stronger, as we recall the words of St. Paul from the second reading: "*Christ indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come*" (2Cor 5:15, 17).