

HOMILY SUNDAY 12-B (Homily 02)

“With Jesus In Our Boat”

(Job 38:1-4, 8-11; 2 Cor 5:14-17; Mk 4:35-41)

Some years ago the movie *Perfect Storm* was released and stirred up a lot of interest. The movie featured the struggle of Atlantic fishermen to survive against the elements, which in this case came together to produce the conditions for a monster storm that took the lives of a fishing crew. The pathos of being lost at sea and the tragic impact on their community was vividly portrayed on film.

The gospel today provides us with a solid anchor of faith for hard times. We are invited to believe in and live for Jesus who masters the elements.

That movie, I believe, gained a lot of attention because it touched some profound universal human themes. Do we not all fear to lose control of our lives, to face overwhelming odds, to get sick, to be confronted with death, to lose financial security? In that sense, the present global economic crisis, based on unbridled greed and irresponsible financial practices, can be seen as a perfect storm in its own right.

No matter how carefully we plan our lives and try to achieve those plans, unforeseen events can and do often upset our lives. Sickness can thwart a career. An accident can irrevocably alter our lives. An addiction in a family member can unsettle a whole family. The loss of employment for many in the present downturn in the economy is an over-riding concern for all. The possibility of a pandemic has already proven to be a major crisis for the country of Mexico, if not for the whole world. The fear of poverty, sickness, invasion and death is always lurking at our doors. How are we to conduct ourselves in the face of this all too present human reality?

The Word of God today provides us with the answer. Believe in Jesus and live for him. The storm in the gospel is symbolic of the many storms that we can and do face in our lives. The suffering of Job in the first reading and his complaint to God about the mystery of his suffering is another symbol of these storms.

The answer from God to Job in the first reading is clear. Who is in charge here? God asks. Job is reminded that his role is to let go of control and to put

his trust in God who created the earth and the oceans, even if he does not understand nor comprehend God's ways.

The gospel takes up the same message, and personalizes it in the person of Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man. The disciples, overwhelmed by the power of the storm that had overtaken them, were overcome with fear that they were going to drown. But they did the right thing – they turned to Jesus and prayed to him to save them, and he did. A word from him and suddenly, there was peace and calm once again.

The question that Jesus then confronts the apostles with is a key question for us. Where was their faith? We can ask how strong is our faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the anointed one sent by God who loves us, died for us, overcame the power of death and now gives us his Spirit to face the storms in our own lives?

St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians reminds us of the love of Christ for us, so great that he died for us and through his resurrection brought about a new creation. We are now to put our trust in Jesus and beyond that, to live for him in this new creation. His message is simple: Believe in Jesus and live for Jesus.

This gospel was significant for me when I faced my own personal storm. Before I was ordained as coadjutor archbishop of the Keewatin-The Pas, I went to the Benedictine Monastery in Muenster to do a four day retreat. The first morning of the retreat, I woke up feeling restless. After the busyness of the announcement, packing, planning and preparations for a whole new life, the retreat took me into a space of silence and reflection. The reality of what awaited me had an opportunity to penetrate my being. I was going to be an archbishop. This was not a three or six year obedience. This was a seventeen year life commitment.

Suddenly it felt like a life sentence. I feared the loss of freedom and independence. I wondered if I could even do this task. What if it proved to be too much for me, as a previous Oblate assignment had been? I suddenly felt a surge of fear, panic and anger. My spirit drooped. Some depression started to creep into my emotions and the fear increased even more, making it hard to pray.

Finally I came across this gospel passage and immediately identified with

the fear of the disciples that they were going to drown. That was my feeling precisely so I decided to pray with this passage.

I had never prayed with my emotions like this before in my life. The emotional storm raged within me for an hour. On the one side, waves of fear, anxiety and depression would wash over me, pressing down on my spirit and pounding away at me like the surf against the shore. Then I would read and ponder the words of that passage again and from the other side, waves of faith and hope and confidence would wash over me, buoying me up and floating me effortlessly along. Back and forth I was tossed like a small craft in the sea. Little by little, however, the rudder of faith and the waves of hope began to gain the upper hand.

And suddenly, the hour of prayer was over, and there was calm. Like wisps of dark clouds banished by the wind after a storm, the feelings of fear, anxiety and depression were all slipping away or gone. In their place, like warm rays of the sun breaking through the clouds and the gentle dripping of water drops from the branches of trees after a storm, the delightful feelings of faith, hope, peace and confidence settled in.

Then other powerful, pleasant emotions asserted themselves. I felt free, liberated, relief and full of joy. I could hardly believe it or contain myself. Could this be really true? Then it dawned on me, it was true and it was real. Jesus had just liberated me from the demons of fear, anxiety and depression, just as surely as he had quelled the storm and calmed the waters for the disciples that day on the Sea of Galilee.

That prayer experience prepared me for the many challenges and problems that would face me as an archbishop, and to this day, I draw strength and assurance from it. I had experienced the power of Jesus to calm a storm in my life. My faith in Jesus had grown stronger and now the challenge was to keep on living for him.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today is an act of faith. It is a way that Jesus chose to stay with us in our boat, to be present to us through Word and Sacrament, to strengthen us so that we can face the challenges of every day life with peace and serenity.

So the message from the Word of God today is simple and clear. With the encouragement of St. Paul, let us put our complete faith and trust in Jesus and live for him.