

The Waves of Doubt

9th Sunday After Pentecost

Matt 14.22–34

Fr. John Vazquez

August 25, 2024

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, one God, amen.

This last week I was able to spend some time at a camp for our diocese up in Canada with about 170 campers and 30 staff, and it was a blessed time. And one of the things that we talked about while we were there was how the campers can take that experience that they have there and bring it home.

Because there, you have this experience of living the Christian life in community very intensely—you pray, in the morning, in the evening in the church. You're doing activities together. You're learning about your faith. You're, doing fun, things—swimming, playing games, and just having a good time together.

This life is what the ideal for the Christian life is—to be living this kind of life together. So how do you carry that and take it home? Well, in the gospel we just read, our Lord is up on a mountain. He's praying, right? And the disciples have just partaken of the loaves that our Lord multiplied. This event just happened.

And now the Lord says, “go, go to the other side of the lake.” Well, in a certain similar way, this is a kind of the experience that each of us have every week. We come to the church, we receive the Lord—the mana from heaven—we're fed and we're sitting at the feet of Christ. We're learning from him.

And then we go out into the world and go back onto the water. You can say “the ocean of life” —Right? Then our Lord up on the mountain comes down. And this is in a way, a picture

the incarnation. He was baptized into this life by taking on human flesh. So he comes and He's with us in the midst of the stormy sea, which is this life, and life is difficult sometimes.

And so when He comes into the water, and the disciples see him they're scared.

First of all, I thought He was up on the mountain. Second of all, how is He walking on water, right? So they have fear, right, and they have a thought that it's Him but are unsure and then He says, "don't be afraid."

And so they're calm. Then Peter, in his boldness, as he so often does, he says, "if it's you Lord, bid me to come to you. So Peter, you heard, goes down to the water and he walks on it.

Then the wind rises up, and he gets afraid, he takes his eyes off the Lord, and he starts to sink in the water.

We can relate can't we?

There's different things that happen to us in our lives that are distracting to us, right?

They can take our focus off of Christ, who is enabling us to also walk on the water, which is maybe a greater miracle than our Lord's miracle of walking on the water.

So Peter is walking on the water to the Lord, and he loses his sight of the Lord. Whatever, whatever it is, there's going to be so many things that distract us, right?

We all have the king of distraction in our back pocket, right? We, or in our front pocket. I don't know how many times a day this happens to me. I'm going to do something on my phone, and then I see I have some other message, and I go to that message and before I know it. I forget what I was going.

So, we are very easily distracted. And if that's the case with worldly things, how much easier is it get distracted in the spiritual life with spiritual things?

This distraction, when we take our eyes off the Christ, can create doubt in us.

Is, is God real? Is God there? Can I be saved? What is all of this about anyway?

Sometimes we're stronger, sometimes we're less strong. But everybody has those, those questions and doubts. Because, why? Because we take our eyes off of Christ and we forget.

We forget that we partake of Him and that He sustains us through this and we forget what

it's like to sit at His feet and learn from Him and be nourished by Him.

So it is something that we should repent of—our doubts and fears. But it's not something you should be surprised at that we are tempted by those doubts.

These come because of the world we live in. There's so many, there's so many things that happen that it's just like, "what is going on? Where is God?"

So we can, we can ask these questions. And that's okay to ask these questions. But, what's not okay is to go so far down that we then turn our back away from our Lord and then we just sink in the water.

So, what can we do to work on combating these doubts that inevitably will arise?

Because we live in this world. We live on the stormy sea of life. We're in the boat of the church together and sometimes the Lord asks us to step out in faith and do something that is maybe difficult to do. Right? So what can we do to combat this doubt?

Well, there's a couple things.

One is, we can do what Peter did. He said, "Lord, save me." Lord, help me. I'm sinking. Right?

And we all have this opportunity, this easy prayer to say, Lord, have mercy. To say, how many times per day?

Whenever you wake up, or you go to bed, or you get in the car, or you get a meal, after you get a meal, all these things, these different times, we can say a quick prayer.

Three, three words. Right? And we have this tradition in the church of a little bit longer prayer—Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me the sinner. We say that with our prayer beads. Right? And we just go along them. And one of the things that is really helpful, that we can do with that prayer is to sit down for five minutes, no noise, no TV, no music. If you can't find that in your house, go for a walk and just pray.

And as you do that, you'll see very quickly, in about ten, twenty seconds, different thoughts will start to pop up. You'll get distracted. Or you'll be tempted to be distracted.

And the point is, we're practicing to not be distracted.

If we want to be good at something, we have to practice that. We don't want to be distracted. If we want to learn how to focus, we have to practice that. And this is one way to do that.

It takes five minutes.

These different thoughts are coming up. You just let them, let them flow by. Don't attach onto them. Because the point is, you're being distracted with your prayer, which is that communion with Christ and so we have to practice to not be distracted. So this is one way that we can pray as Peter did.

Another way that we can combat this doubt in our lives is to admit that we have doubts sometimes. We don't have to say, I've never doubted in my life, I've always believed.

We've all had questions, we've all had doubts, and that's okay. So be honest about that. And that honesty is what our Lord wants.

Lord, I wonder if you're there—be honest in your prayers to the Lord.

That's what the Psalms are. They are all very honest talks with God.

So one of the ways we can be honest with God is to read the Psalms and make those prayers our prayers. The Psalms are the prayerbook of the Church. And we pray those psalms and we, and we connect ourselves to them.

So try these two things. Just take five minutes a day and say the Jesus prayer and work on not being distracted and then also one psalm. It takes 30 seconds.

It's like when we're little babies—our parents sit down and they talk to us in baby language

And when we get a little bit older, they talk more normally with us. And then when we become adults, we can have a conversation with them. We're all growing in our ability to pray.

The Psalms are one of our great teachers of how to pray, of how to call upon Him who is our Lord.

Pray the Jesus prayer and pray the Psalms and so combat the doubt that would otherwise distract us from our savior. Lord help us! Amen.