

The Storms within  
Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time  
Homily for June 20, 2021

Victor Hugo, who is famous for his novel the Hunchback of Notre Dame, also wrote a story called "Ninety-Three." It tells of a ship caught in a dangerous storm on the high seas. At the height of the storm, the frightened sailors heard a terrible crashing noise below the deck. They knew at once that this new noise came from a cannon, part of the ship's cargo, that had broken loose. It was moving back and forth with the swaying of the ship, crashing into the side of the ship with terrible impact. Knowing that it could cause the ship to sink, two brave sailors volunteered to make the dangerous attempt to retie the loose cannon. They knew the danger of a shipwreck from the cannon was greater than the fury of the storm.

That is like human life. Storms of life may blow about us, but it is not these exterior storms that pose the gravest danger. It is the storms that can exist within us which can overwhelm us. The furious storm outside may be overwhelming but what is going on inside can pose the greater threat to our lives. Like the sailors we need to be able to retie the cannon.

The Gospel of Jesus teaches that the storms that rage within us cannot be cured by ourselves. It takes the power of God's love, as revealed in Jesus Christ. He is our hope of stilling the tempest that can harm our souls and cripple our lives.

That is what the disciples learned this day on the Sea of Galilee. They thought the danger lay outside the boat. They would soon learn the real danger lay within the boat, within their own hearts. In a word, they lacked faith. And without faith their lives were at risk to the storms which would inevitably come. And come they did and come they will. So, what can we learn from this boat ride in the storm?

First, we learn that storms can come suddenly. The Sea of Galilee is notorious for sudden storms. Those light bilious clouds can take on a menacing character very quickly and the boat on the calm sea can become like riding a wild bronco that will throw you. Here we can see the association with our own lives. How those storms can arise for us – where circumstances and situations over which we cannot control swamp the boat of our lives so that we too cry out, "Teacher do you not care we are perishing"?

Think for instance of the suddenness with which COVID changed our lives like a Galilean storm. Think of the circumstances of your life where a relationship break-up, a job that does not materialise, an illness or a death changes lives drastically and permanently.

Storms can come suddenly, and consequently they can make you lose direction.

Many of the disciples were experienced fisherman. They had charted those waters hundreds of times before. They had been caught in storms previously; so, why all the fear in this storm? One obvious answer is this was a storm unlike any other. Possibly, but I don't think so. I think this

storm was like any other. They knew how to deal with. What I think is this: They are chastising Jesus for not pulling his wait. The disciples find Jesus asleep, and they say, “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?” In other words, are you just going to sleep there or you going to get up and help? Get up and grab an oar Jesus; we need all hand on deck.

It is at this moment that the unexpected happens. Jesus gets up. He does not grab an oar. He calms the storm. And this is why the disciples were terrified. Look at the story. The disciples are certainly frightened by the ferocity of the storm. They need everyone to pitch in, but Jesus rebukes the storm, “Quiet! Be still!” The disciples are stunned. They were looking for human help. What they got was divine authority. They were looking for a hand. What they got was a God. They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”

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Storms can come suddenly, and they can make us lose direction. It is when we are here that we are especially invited to turn to Jesus. Listen to how St. Augustine in his sermon on this passage put it some 1700 years ago:

I want to urge you not to let the faith sleep in your hearts against the storms and waves of this world. After all, it can scarcely be true that Christ the Lord had power over death, and did not have power over sleep, and that sleep possibly overtook the Almighty against his will, as he was out on the water.

Then he goes down a little bit further. He says:

We are all of us temples of God, and every one of us is sailing a boat in his heart...

You have heard an insult—it’s a high wind; you’ve got angry—it’s a wave. So as the wind blows and the waves break, the boat is in peril, your heart is in peril, your heart is tossed about. When you hear the insult, you are eager to avenge it; you do avenge it, and by giving way to someone else’s evil, you suffer shipwreck. And why is that? Because Christ is asleep in you. What does it mean, that Christ is asleep in you? That you have forgotten Christ. So, wake up, remember Christ; let Christ stay awake in you, think about him.

Do you hear what Augustine is doing here? He is counseling us to turn ever more fully to Jesus and to awaken him in our heart. As we grow in trusting him more fully. It is this very thing that St. Paul invites us to consider in the reading from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians. In Jesus we are people who do not look at the world primarily from the perspective of the storms. And let me tell you that in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians St. Paul details the storms he experienced extensively. A governing word of this letter is “affliction” And so now we are seeing our lives not from the limited view of a world devoid of Jesus – rather we are learning to live for Jesus who died and was raised from the dead.

In conclusion You need not panic, though the situation may appear bleak. The Lord of the Church is in the boat with you. You need not forsake your witness. The Lord of History is in

the boat with you. You need not become immobilized. The Lord of the storm is in the boat with you. That is the promise.

Will the clouds dissipate immediately? No guarantee. Will you no longer have to struggle with problems? It is never promised. Will you henceforth prosper?

Probably not. Well, you say, it doesn't sound as though the promise that is given is all that great. Perhaps not. But it got Noah through the storm. It got the Jews through the wilderness. It got Mary through her pregnancy. It got Jesus through the crucifixion, and it will be sufficient to get you through the storms you face.