

Homily For Tuesday of the 18th Week of Ordinary Time - Year II

St Peter's 8:30am Mass - August 2, 2022

Jer. 30:1-2,12-22 "All your lovers have forgotten you. I have dealt you the blow of an enemy."

Psalms 102:15-22 "He heard the groans of the prisoners to set free those doomed to die."

Matthew 14:22-36 "The boat was battered by the waves, for the wind was against them."

Take Heart. I Am. Do Not Be Afraid

Introduction

I am as fascinated as anyone by what we have learned through scientific inquiry. I am in favour of learning about the natural world through human technology and ingenuity and creativity. The problem is never what we have learned, though. The problems are always what we do with what we have learned. If we were a more wise culture, we would be wise enough to be a little less in love with our knowledge and our inventions, and a little more afraid of the ways in which our knowledge can be used to harm, and to set people at odds with each other. But the biggest problem by far is that we replace our knowledge and love of God with that human knowledge. We become so proud of ourselves that God gets pushed out, first of all from the middle of our hearts to the periphery, then gone entirely. Without God we are subject not only to pride but to fear. Fear affects us all. It is always close at hand if we are not careful to understand what keeps ourselves from being overwhelmed. It is vital that we be aware of what is happening in the world around us.

Matthew

Even for the disciples closest to Jesus, when he is not immediately present, the first reaction to real or imagined danger is to be terrified. I think it is wonderful that, in the storm on the sea, when they see a figure walking on the water is to shout, "It's a ghost!" This exclamation always reminds me of the children's cartoon I watched as a child. It was *Casper, the Friendly Ghost*. Casper wandered

around looking for friends but everyone he meets is terrified at first. The cartoon featured people and animals alike screaming just that, "It's a ghost."

Now listen to what Jesus says in response to this terror, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid." "It is I," is comforting because it means Jesus is telling them that his presence should give them some assurance in the storm. However, it is pretty clear that the translators themselves seem to have been afraid to be as specific and literal as possible in their translation. The translation clearly must read, not "It is I," but "I AM." I AM is the divine name. Jesus is not just telling them that their miracle working buddy will fix things for them. He is declaring that, in the face of all worldly fears, GOD IS NOW WITH THEM.

Again, it is wonderful how the Sacred Scripture paints a picture. It says that the wind was against them. Nature itself, without the presence of Jesus, is a threat. It happens again when Peter looks away from Jesus. So, twice there is the point that, without God, brutal nature holds sway. In our own time, we see climate change as a fearful enemy. It turns people against each other and makes us forget the source of our courage and peace. Without Jesus, the earth itself seems to rebel against human activity. The environmental weather report is terrifying us so much that we are missing the spiritual weather report, which is that Jesus is God, who is Emmanuel – God with us.

Immediately after "Take courage," and immediately before "Do not be afraid," is the declaration of his divine presence. He is the great 'I am'. He is the sole source of courage and peace in the centre of the storms of our lives. He IS the reason for us to take courage and not to be afraid.

Jeremiah

The same thing happened for Jeremiah. Yesterday, a prophet named Hananiah was telling the king and everyone else not to be afraid, that they would overcome the Babylonian threat. But Jeremiah, open to the word of God, receives the message for the people that they will indeed be conquered and that they should prepare themselves spiritually. He looks at Hananiah and says, "The Lord has not

sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie." He then tells the people that their sin has pushed God out of the picture and that they will suffer the consequences, so use that terror as a motivation to return to God.

Even in the church, there are those who want the favour of the world. But prophets often have to tell the hard truth. Jeremiah told this truth in love. Love often requires telling a hard truth.

Jeremiah uses multiple images to describe the hopelessness of the people. It is a grievous and incurable wound with no medicine. It is a deadly blow. It is an accusation with no one to defend them i.e. to uphold their cause. And yet, God reaches down, offers his hand to a drowning nation and says, "I will restore your life... you shall be my people and I will be your God."

Call To Action

Let's face it. If we were as fearful as the many news would suggest we should be, there would be no possibility of peace or joy. Even faith itself would be so eroded as to leave us abandoned to those fears. But only look at what Jesus did within a 24 hour period. He fed 5000 from almost nothing, walked on water, rescued Peter when he sunk in the waves, calmed the storm, then healed everyone who came to him, even if all they did was touch the fringe of his garment.

Do we get anxious when we hear whatever kind of news? Listen to Jesus speak these words to us. Christian confidence and optimism is not based upon the absence of difficulties, but upon God who says: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Peter said, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." But he then doubted. Another disciple bowed down and confess before their Master: "Truly, you are the Son of God."

Ultimately, though, our salvation is in letting Jesus' words sink deep in our hearts: "Take courage. I am. Do not be afraid."

Key Passages

Jeremiah: *The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord, "Thus says the Lord: 'You wound is incurable and there is no medicine. All your lovers have forgotten you. There is no one to uphold your cause, no medicine for your wound, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you. They care nothing for you. I have dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are so numerous. I am going to restore the fortunes of Jacob and have compassion. The city shall be rebuilt. Out of them shall come thanksgiving. I will make them many. I will make them honoured. Their children shall be as of old. I will punish all who oppress them. And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.*

Psalms: *The Lord will appear in his glory. He will regard the prayer of the destitute and will not despise their prayer. So that a people yet unborn may praise the Lord. He looked at the earth to hear the groans of the prisoners, to set free those who were doomed to die. His praise will be in Jerusalem when peoples gather together to worship the Lord.*

Matthew: *After the crowd had eaten enough, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go on ahead to the other side while he went up the mountain by himself to pray. He was there alone, but the boat, battered by the waves, was far from land, for the wind was against them. Early in the morning, Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. The disciples were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" But immediately Jesus spoke to them, "Take heart. It is I. do not be afraid. Peter answered, "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord save me!" Jesus reached out and caught him, saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Those in the boat worshipped him saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." When they had crossed over, the people brought all who were sick to him. Even those who touched the fringe of his cloak were healed.*