



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Fr. Paul Kidner
19th Sunday, Year A
08/10/08

Mt. 14:22-33

Welcome to the Mass for the 19th Ordinary Sunday. Our gospel is the story of Peter's failure in faith when he committed himself to Christ's power to enable him to walk on the water, then began to sink. Jesus invites us to have faith in him even when we feel that we are overwhelmed with difficulties. When we are out of our depth, he is there to help us. Let us prepare for this Mass by recalling the sinfulness which prevents us from trusting in God.

Commentators on this gospel passage about the boat on the stormy sea and Peter's failure in faith make a straightforward application of the gospel story to us, where the storm-tossed boat is the church. The stormy sea symbolizes the problems, both internal and external, which the Christian community has to face. We are the church, the people of God. We are human and our faith is weak. Christ rebukes us for our little faith and tells us to trust in him. He has the power to still the storm and bring us to safety, and he does so. This realization of his help in time of trouble should be a source of strength for our faith.

What is faith? It is not the result of a superficial feeling. Nor does it consist of reasoning. It goes beyond reason, but that does not mean that it is unreasonable. We believe on the authority of God revealing the truth. It is not unreasonable to believe on his authority, for he is truth; he is all-knowing, all-powerful. Faith is commitment. It means saying Yes to God's revelation. Commitment to God's authority to reveal is not the same as full comprehension of the truth that is revealed. Faith is compatible with difficulties about the validity of what we believe, with a state of questioning.

Peter's failure, his beginning to sink, was not the result of doubt about his ability to walk on the water -- of course he doubted his own power to do



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this. But having committed himself to Christ's power to hold him up he wavered in that commitment. So it is with us. Faith, trust in God, is not incompatible with doubt. We can be torn by doubt and still be firmly committed to God. The man who cried out to Jesus "I do believe; help my unbelief" had a full faith but he recognized that the very power to believe is a grace from God that must be prayed for and be nourished by prayer.

We, the Church, are being tossed about by a sea of unrest. But this does not mean that our commitment to God's power and authority is less than if we were in calm waters. In fact there will be waves in every age, and the same strong commitment to God's power and authority will be needed in every age. We must trust in his strength, not in our own weakness.

Our failure to recognize Christ's care for us in the midst of difficulties is beautifully expressed in the story Footprints which many of you may be familiar with: One night a man had a dream. He dreamt he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For most scenes he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him and the other to the Lord. But when he looked back at the footprints he noticed that many times during the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. And this happened at the lowest and most difficult times in his life. This worried him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that at the most troublesome times in my life there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.' The Lord replied, "My child, I would never abandon you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, that was when I carried you."