

Children

Have you ever been caught out in a thunderstorm? It's scary, isn't it? The thunder is booming, the lightning is flashing, the wind is howling, the rain is pouring down. (Might want to make some sound effects here) Can you sound like a thunderstorm? (Give them a few seconds to let loose with their sound effects) Wow, that's scary! I bet most of your mommies and daddies carry an umbrella in their car. They keep the umbrella with them, even on sunny days, just in case it happens to rain. Of course, the umbrella can protect us from the rain and the wind, but it doesn't stop us from being afraid in a storm, does it?

Our Bible story today is about a great big storm. Jesus' followers, the disciples, were out on their boat, fishing, when a great, big storm kicked up. All the disciples were really scared. Then they saw the strangest thing. Jesus was walking across the water of the lake, walking right toward their boat! And when Jesus got to the boat, He said, "Cheer up! Don't be afraid!" Jesus wasn't afraid of the storm. And once the disciples were with Jesus, they weren't afraid either. They knew everything would be okay with Him there.

Sometimes we may feel like we have storms in our life. When we just had a fight with a friend, when we did something we know we shouldn't have done, when we said something that made our mommy or daddy mad that can make us feel all scared and confused just like a thunderstorm. But we don't have to be afraid. Jesus is always with us. Just like our parents carry an umbrella with them in case of rain, we can carry Jesus with us wherever we go. We can carry Him in our hearts. Remember next time you're afraid or sad that Jesus is in your heart, and with His help, we don't have to be afraid of anything.

I

In the story of creation found in the Book of Genesis, we read where Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, something which had been specifically denied them. Knowing that God is searching for them, they attempt to hide. It is a scene perhaps reminiscent of many of our childhoods when we had done something that we were not supposed to and we literally hid from our searching parents. Finally, God, like our parents finds them, as we know that He will, for, after all, where can we go to hide from God? God asks them why they are hiding. Do you remember the response that Adam gave: "Because, I was afraid."

I think this very poignant story reminds us that fear is so basic to who we are as humans, it goes all the way back to the beginning of time. To be human is to experience fear.

There seems to be no limit to our fears. In a Peanuts cartoon strip Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for a nickels worth of psychiatric help. She proceeds to pinpoint his particular fear. Perhaps, she says, you have hypengyophobia, which is the fear of responsibility. Charlie Brown says no. Well, perhaps you have ailurophobia, which is the fear of cats. No. Well, maybe you have climacophobia, which is the fear of staircases. No. Exasperated, Lucy says well, maybe you have pantophobia, which is the fear of everything. Yes, says Charles, that is the one!

Sometimes we feel like we are afraid of everything. We are afraid of ourselves. We are afraid of people. We are afraid of the future. We are afraid of the past. We are afraid of life. We are afraid of death.

Every person, every Christian, must fight their own fears. Even Paul, the sturdy Christian warrior, had to do so. He wrote of his arrival in Corinth: "For when we came into Macedonia we had not rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings; within were fears." Paul was full of fears, just like you and me--the fear of inadequacy, the fear of failing.

But perhaps the most surprising fear of many people, and one that we do not like to address is the fear of God. It is the fear that God is not really on our side. It is the fear that God will put us out on a limb and leave us. It is the fear that in the midst of the storm we will be overcome.

It is not a new idea. One of the great fears of the ancient people was that God would fall asleep. Can you imagine such a thing? When the prophets of Baal could not get their Gods to rain down fire on the top of Mt. Carmel, Elijah taunted them: Maybe your God is asleep, he said. On the other hand, the Jews took great comfort in the fact that the God of Israel neither slumbered nor slept.

Over and over again the message of the Bible is fear not. When Abram took his family to the Promised Land he feared that he was turning his back on everything he knew, his security for the unknown. God spoke to him: Fear not Abram, I am your shield and your reward will be great.

When the Jews stood at the Red Sea and could see Pharaoh's chariots coming on the horizon, they cried out that they would all be slaughtered. Moses said to them: Stand still, fear not, and see the salvation of the Lord.

When the angel of the Lord came to Mary and said that she would bear a child, she trembled with fear. What would become of her? Said the angel: Fear not Mary, for you have found favor with God.

I

First, I would say to you that we must confront our fears. We pay a price when we don't deal with our fears. I was raised in a generation (the baby boomers) that had to live for years with the ultimate fear: Thermonuclear war. People lived in fear that there would be a war with Russia. As a child I distinctly remember believing that the world might come to an end. Over 500,000 bomb shelters were built during a three-year period in America. I was upset that my parents wouldn't put one up in the basement.

What is the result of raising an entire generation of children in fear? I'll tell you. It was my generation that started the drug and sexual revolution. And I know that it is a complex issue, but I truly believe that many people took the attitude: Well, what difference does it make we are all going to die anyway? Might as well have some fun before you go. Morals were thrown out the window and many became fatalistic. I will

always believe that we paid a terrible social price in America because we did not adequately deal with our national fear during the mid sixties.

Simon Peter is out in the boat crossing the lake of Galilee after a long day with the crowds. Earlier that day he saw Jesus take the bread and fish and feed 20,000 people. Now he is stepping out of the boat into the storm trying to imitate his Master walking on the water. Tempestuous Peter tempting the storm. He's successful for a moment but the situation gets the best of him. Fear rises and his body sinks.

Over and over again the message of the Bible is clear: Fear not, fear not. Over seventy times this is mentioned in scriptures, more than any other human emotion. Did you realize that? So if you have your fears, you are not alone, trust me. Paul, writing to the young disciple Timothy said, God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind.

Once we have grasped this most basic understanding, then we can go about dealing with our fears. That is the first step. Confronting our fears. Seeing that they are there and putting in their place the Spirit of God who replaces them with a sound mind of love and power. We are not powerless in the midst of the storm. We have the Spirit at our side. I can hear God whispering in the Peter's ear: Quit letting your imagination magnify your fears. The storm is furious but I am greater still. And I would remind you that of the 500,000 bomb shelters built in the US not one of them was ever used. Harness your imagination don't let it harness you.

II.

So first we must confront our fears, walk out of the boat to Christ. And second, we must understand that too much doubt can sink us. Charles Kettering, the one time research head of General Motors, said when he wanted a problem solved, he'd place a table outside the meeting room with a sign: Leave slide rules here. If I didn't do that, I'd find someone reaching for his slide rule. Then he'd be on his feet saying, "Boss, you can't do it." I can see the other disciples in fear of the storm that is torturing the boat, in fear of the ghost walking on the water, exhausted from a long day feeding the masses....Peter, you can't do that. We don't know who that is out on the water. It's a hallucination. It's the devil. God knows what it is but Peter you can't do that.

But Peter does. I don't know for how long but Peter walks on the water toward Jesus. Peter said Lord if it is you, you can make me to walk on the water with you. Do you see that? Peter's walk on the lake is not the point. The point is he wants to confirm that this ghost on the water is Jesus. Jesus can make him walk; a ghost will only make him wet.

Peter knows that the Lord can sustain us. Even in the midst of the storm, when there is nothing but uncertainty. He will take care of you. But I want you to know that faith is a risk taking enterprise. It does not come in a perfect package. I often find myself caught midway between faith and doubt. Peter gets caught between Christ and the crests of the waves. He doubts his walk. He fears the storm. And he falls beneath the waves. This is a great tale of what the church can accomplish if we put our faith in Christ but it's also a story about our weaknesses.

But here's the good news. If we sink, if we take our gaze off of Christ, if waves seem destined to engulf us we can call on our savior and his grace will pull us through.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn was the first author to alert the West to the horrible realities he experienced in Stalin's labor camps. Solzhenitsyn said that only once during his long imprisonment in a labor camp in the Soviet Union did he become so discouraged that he thought about suicide. He was outdoors, on a work detail, and he had reached a point where he no longer cared whether he lived or died. When he had a break, he sat down, and a stranger sat beside him, someone he had never seen before and would never see again. For no apparent reason, this stranger took a stick and drew a cross on the ground.

Solzhenitsyn sat and stared at that cross for a long while. He later wrote, "Staring at that cross, I realized that therein lies freedom." At that point – in the midst of a storm – he received new courage and the will to live. The storm didn't end that day, but through Jesus, Solzhenitsyn found the strength to ride it out.

I don't know what storm of life will come your way this week, or what storm you may be enduring at this very moment. But I know this: even as the storm rages around you, if you will listen very carefully with your heart, you will hear a gentle voice calling to you, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." And in time the storm will pass. And Jesus will still be there.

III

Secondly, we must remember that regardless of what happens, God will be with us. Wrote the Psalmist: When I am afraid I put my trust in you. Well, let me ask you. Where else are you going to go? If the Dow drops tomorrow to 7,000, God is still going to be the same. God is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. If we go to war with China tomorrow God is going to be the same. God does not change. If you get a bad medical report where are you going to go? God is going to be the same. Nothing has truly changed.

In his Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker says that so many of the fears that we grapple with, the fear of rejection, abandonment, failure, separation, loss, are but manifestations of the one ultimate fear, and that is the fear of death. Perhaps he is right. How do we overcome that ultimate fear? Faith. It is the only anecdote that will exercise the demons of fear that can haunt us. I think it is telling that when Peter stepped out onto the lake, walked on the water, became terrified and started to sink, Jesus later asked him why he doubted. Why didn't his faith carry him across the water to Jesus' side? It was fear. Fear crept in and doubt began to rise and Peter began to sink.

It's the story of our life isn't it? In the boat we are safe but we on occasion are willing to brave the storm and walk on water and do the impossible through our faith. It is then we suddenly realize the wind is in our face and the storm is raging, it causes fear and doubt creeps. Our faith is fragile isn't it?

The story is told of old Bishop Chandler Warren, after whom the school of theology at Emory University was named. As he lay on his deathbed, a friend inquired as to whether or not he was afraid. Please tell me frankly, he said, do you fear crossing the river of death. Why, replied Chandler, I belong to a father who owns the land on both sides of the river.

In life, there are storms, but God is with us. That is our great salvation and hope. I want you to know that God cares if you are immobilized by some fear in your life. But there comes a time when, like everything else, you must place your fear at the Foot of the cross and then lean back into the arms of an ever loving and gracious God. Then we too can echo the words of the old hymn: God will take care of you; he will take care of you.

Edited from ChristianGlobe Network, [eSermons](#), by Brett Blair

II Fr Joseph Pellegrino

I want to start this week at the beginning: "In the beginning God created heaven and earth." Now that is really the beginning. We learn from *Genesis* that on the first day God created the heavens and earth and then created light to overcome the darkness. On the second day, we learn that the earth was covered in water. God created land and separated the seas from the land. He conquered the seas.

To the ancient people, the seas represented chaos. Fishermen and sailors, then, as well as now, know all too well the sudden turmoil caused by rough waters. If you ever saw the movie, *The Perfect Storm*, you would understand why the water is associated with chaos. Think back to the horrible Asian tsunami that killed hundreds of thousands. I experienced a terrifying blizzard when I was in Boston at the beginning of my priesthood. Since the Boston area is on the water, tremendous damage was caused by the sea. I used to show people homes in the Revere and Winthrop area that had their second story windows destroyed by waves.

The sea hits us in the front, the back, the left and the right. There is no escaping it when we are in the middle of it. That is chaos.

But God conquered the seas. And Jesus walked on the water. He continues to walk on water. He walks on the chaos of our lives.

That is one of the messages of today's Gospel reading. No matter what chaos there is in the world and in our lives, Jesus walks on it. He conquers the chaos.

Jesus conquers the chaos that is caused by things that are beyond our control. Life itself is chaotic. Just when all seems to be calm, a loved one suddenly dies. All of us have experienced this. We did not cause the chaos, but we do suffer from it.

Jesus conquers the chaos, even that chaos which we ourselves cause in our lives. Many of us have made bad choices. Many of us have sinned. Many of us suffer the results of our sins or the sins of others. For example, a person finally recognizes that he has gotten into a relationship which is destroying his family and destroying himself. He returns to his family, but the damage has been done. He and his family suffer the results of his sins.

It makes no difference whether we caused the chaos or whether we suffer from the chaos caused by others. Jesus still walks on the water. He conquers the chaos. Then, do you know what he does? He calls us to walk out onto the chaos and walk towards him. "Come Peter." Peter walked on the water. At least for a bit.

That is what Jesus does for us all. He walks on the chaos of our lives, and then calls us to come and join him. He gives us the strength to walk on water.

And what if we fail? What if we blink, and sink like Peter did? "Don't be afraid," the Lord says. He is there to reach down and lift us out of the water, out of the chaos, just as he lifted Peter out of the water, out of the chaos of his life.

The Lord knows that we are not saints, not yet anyway. He knows that we are weak. He accepted Peter, that loud lout, that well-meaning coward, and turned him into the Rock of the Church. He takes us as we are and walks with us on the water. He only asks us to have the courage to put our faith in Him. He gives us the strength to join Him in conquering the chaos.

Where is the chaos in your lives, in my life? Is it sickness or death? Is it chemical dependence? Is it some other addiction? Is it turmoil in your marriage or your family? Where have the seas raised up to chaotic dimensions? Wherever that chaos is, please remember, that there is nothing, no chaos that is too great for Jesus to conquer. And there is nothing too devastating for us to conquer with Him.

He walked on the waters, and He calls us to walk with Him.

III Fr Desiano

We will do anything when we are desperate, I suppose. Look at the things this pandemic has us doing that we never would have imagined a year ago—from wearing masks, to taking frequent temperatures, to avoiding members of our families out of fear. We similarly will take bigger risks when we face bigger health problems, whether it's dangerous operations or long-term chemotherapy.

But what happens when the emergency ends, and we are no longer desperate? What happens when life returns to normal?

The disciples are desperate, and Peter is so desperate he's willing to take huge risk. He is not even sure that the figure is Jesus—"It's a ghost!" they all shouted. But Peter decides to take a chance. He calls out to Jesus words that represent anything but faith: "If it is you, command me to come to you." If . . . Do you think you can build a life of faith on bunch of "if's"?

Peter has pride but not much shame. He's not afraid to cry out, "Lord, save me." He did not really get it when Jesus said not to be afraid. "It is I," said Jesus, the very thing that Peter dares to question with his "if." But now, as he sinks into the water, fully aware of the wind that encircled him and the boat, he has nowhere else to go. "Lord save me." And Jesus reaches out his hand to grab him. "Oh you of little faith," he says.

We often have difficult periods in our lives when, just like Peter, we cry out: Lord, save me; Lord, save us. In times of war. In times of pandemic. In times when we face serious medical issues. In

times when we are abandoned by the people we have needed the most. In times when we or the people we love seem to face death.

But then what happens? After the emergency? So often we revert to the keep-God-distant, or God-isn't-that-important attitude we usually carry. We cry out in desperation, but we do not want to live truly as people of faith. We stretch out our hands in fear, but we otherwise hardly ever raise them in prayer.

We learn from the first reading that we can be fooled in our approach to God. We can think that God only comes in thunder, or in earthquakes, or in times of great fear or stress. But is not God also in our quiet moments, in the softer moments of our lives, in the everyday way we relate to each other, in the ordinary hopes that we carry in our hearts? Only when we seek God at every moment of our lives do we begin to understand the vastness of God's presence and love.

Jesus wants us to cry out to him in our need. But Jesus also wants us to talk to him in all the moments of our lives. Jesus promises to be present in emergencies or in our danger; but he promises to be present always, until the end of time. It is in the "always" that we learn discipleship, that we learn to follow steadily behind Jesus and walk confidently with him.

When Jesus lifts Peter from the boat, Peter is not saved. He's only rescued. In fact, when he gets back into the boat and starts to feel safe, Peter is just beginning to learn what salvation, and discipleship, are all about. Often that's where we are as well. Just at the beginning stage. "It is I," says Jesus, always wanting to help us grow more deeply in faith.