

Homily 8-13-17

St. John Paul II became the successor of St. Peter in October of 1978. There was a lot of bad news then just like there is today. There's always bad news. But there's always good news, too. In 1978 the Cold War threatened world peace. Modern culture was destroying traditional social and moral values. Priests and religious were abandoning their vocations in large numbers. The right and the left battled over the meaning of Vatican II. What was John Paul II's first message at the beginning of his long pontificate? It was an echo of the words we heard in today's gospel, "Be not afraid".

Storms come to you and me. They can come suddenly and violently. Sometimes they tear our world apart. They can come in the form of a phone call from a doctor confirming a diagnosis, from a police officer bearing news of an automobile accident, from a spouse saying she is leaving, a pink slip from an employer, the death of a loved one, children on drugs or running with the wrong crowd. And being in the church certainly does not protect us from the storms of life. Do you know where you are sitting right now? I am in the sanctuary. But what do you call the place where you are? It's called the nave. It's from the Latin word for ship. Then we have the English word Navy. In much of church architecture the top of the church is shaped like the bottom of a ship. Every time we come here to worship the Lord of the universe we are supposed to see, from church architecture, that we are sitting in a boat. We are pilgrim travelers going from this world to the Father's house. And that boat goes through a lot of storms and turbulence, both from within and without. Storm clouds gather and the boat can get swamped. But it does not sink. There's the key! The gospel is not a story of God having to prove himself to us. Rather, it is a story of whether or not we believe that Christ will not let his people perish. If you don't remember anything else of what I say today maybe this is the most important. In the end, God will not allow his faithful sons and daughters to be lost.

A number of years ago a mother lost her child at birth. She almost lost her faith as well. But listen to how she explained that stormy experience. Listen to her own words. "All my multilayered, carefully constructed faith was stripped away as I focused on one thing-- the injustice that our little girl did not have a chance to take even a single breath. Prayer seemed so futile, even unnecessary, like throwing a glass of water on a burning house. I had prayed my entire pregnancy for the baby to be healthy and she was. Carly was perfect; but she was not alive. How could I not feel betrayed? In the weeks following Carly's death well-meaning friends and relatives called and sent hundreds of cards and letters offering helpless words of condolence. Most of their efforts said the same thing. "It was God's will. We cannot understand God's will". Those words kept me up at night for months spinning through my frantic mind, tying me in philosophical knots. I know they were trying to help, but every time the issue of God's will sprang up I was

miserable". Finally the exhausted mother wrote these words, " Some wonder why, after our experience, I still want to make the painful effort to believe. I can only respond that having seen the breathtaking perfection of my daughter's peaceful face it is impossible to think that God was not there". Somehow, beyond the miracle that never came, this woman sensed the presence of someone. Someone with a capital S. In today's gospel, why did our Lord wait until the fourth watch of the night to come to the rescue? The struggle against foul weather probably lasted for much of the night. Why didn't our Lord come to them sooner? Why did he wait until the fourth and final watch of the night? The Bible is full of stories of people having to wait on God such as Noah, Abraham, David, Daniel, Simeon, Anna, Zechariah and Elizabeth. Job waited almost a lifetime and still got no full answer from God. Moses waited 40 years in the desert and never entered the promised land.

Patience is one of the hardest virtues for modern people to cultivate. The gospel is not a story of God having to prove himself to us. It is a story to show that God will not allow the boat to sink or his faithful followers to be lost.

God love you!