

12th Sunday of the Year – Homily

This last week much of the country was bathed in warm sunshine and then towards the end of the week some people experienced a month's rain in less than a day. The weather can be very unpredictable and, indeed, dangerous as we have just heard in today's gospel. Jesus had finished a long day of preaching in parables, two of which we heard last Sunday. Now, probably to the amazement of the disciples he suggests they take a boat trip to the other side of the lake populated by gentiles. It was during the crossing that a storm arose and even though most of the disciples had spent their previous lives fishing, they were terrified, waking the sleeping Jesus with what amounted to an accusation, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down.' Jesus doesn't answer the question directly, rather he addresses the wind and the sea, 'Quiet now, be calm.' And the wind dropped and all was calm again. Only now does Jesus speak to the disciples asking them why they were frightened, and questioning their faith, or lack of it. They, in their turn ask, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and sea obey him.'

In saying these words, the disciples were beginning to answer their own question because they would have known from the Hebrew Scriptures that the ability to control the sea was a sign of divine power. Let me quote a couple of lines from today's psalm – "then they cried to the Lord in their need, and he rescued them from their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper, all the waves of the sea were hushed." They would also have known that the storm at sea was a metaphor for the powers of evil and destruction which only God could subdue. The conclusion being that the disciples should trust in Jesus even in the most dire circumstances.

Crossing the lake to the Gentile side involves leaving the relative comfort of what they knew, to be challenged by different circumstances. It also marks the beginning of Jesus reaching out to people who were not Jews, something that the apostle Paul would do to great effect. This would bring its own internal challenges as the early followers of Jesus struggled with being true to the past and open to the future.

There is so much in this short passage for us today as we face the storms within our world and Church. The huge inequality which still exists in terms of power, wealth, educational opportunities, work prospects and so forth. Those living under unjust and ruthless regimes where opponents disappear without trace. Migrants leaving their own homelands in search of a future free from violence or poverty. Within the Church the inequality of opportunity between men and women, the lack of inclusiveness, the voicelessness of so many, the scandal of abuse, the huge number of people who no longer regard the Church as relevant to their lives. In such circumstances do we hold up our hands crying, 'Do you not care?' or, do we recognise the presence of Jesus in the messiness of our lives, a presence that will help us to be part of the answer by raising important questions, unmasking the presence of evil in its many and varied forms, and being more determined after celebrating this Mass together, not to accept things as they are, but to be agents of real and lasting transformation.

Bidding Prayers for the 12th Sunday of the Year

Celebrant:

Just as Jesus calmed the storm, he calms our fears and anxieties. Trusting in him we ask him to calm the storms the world endures.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will be a place of reconciliation for all who are seeking peace in their own lives and the lives of others.

Lord in your mercy

For world leaders and Governments – that they will do all they can to promote peace in the world, especially in those countries where there is violence and war.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit – that they, and their families and carers, will receive the support and love they need at this time.

Lord in your mercy

For ourselves, especially when we are anxious or afraid – that we will always turn to Jesus who calmed the waters of chaos, and walks with us in every circumstance of our lives.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disasters and the current pandemic, for Fr Larry Nemer, a good friend who died last week, and John Wade, Clare Byrne, Brian Wilde, Ernest Robinson, Dr Peter Timothy Morris, Audrey Healey and Donald Chadderton whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

God, ever present in our time of need, increase in us the gift of faith in you and never let us fail to trust your mercy. With your forgiveness at hand may we live always anew in the Spirit. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen