



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG

FAITH CIRCLES

WEEKLY SMALL
GROUP CATECHESIS

19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME • YEAR A



Henry Oshawa Tanner - *The Disciples See Christ Walking on the Water*, c. 1907 (Des Moines Art Center)

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Keeping our Eye on Jesus

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he would send the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now far out on the lake, was battling with a heavy sea, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night he went towards them, walking on the lake, and when the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified. 'It is a ghost' they said, and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord', he said 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' 'Come' said Jesus. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but as soon as he felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord! Save me!' he cried. Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'Man of little faith,' he said 'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.' ■

GOSPEL REFLECTION

Sr Sue Barker SGS



We are often reminded in the gospel stories of Jesus' close relationship with his Father, and how it was his practice after

a busy day among the people, to "go away to pray". Meanwhile, he sends them on ahead.

Yet, Jesus' prayer is not an escape from his ministry. In his union with his Father, he seems still in deep communion with the disciples, and so becomes aware of their struggle in the boat. Having taught them so much about trusting in him by the miracle of the loaves and fishes, he will teach them further by their experience of the storm.

Peter becomes the archetype of the follower of Jesus: strong and loyal in his love for Jesus, but weak in

faith and courage. I suggest Jesus' words, "Man of little faith; why did you doubt," might be read as a wry, almost humorous observation rather than a chiding rebuke. Jesus knows Peter's foibles better than Peter knows them himself. Jesus is not the least surprised by Peter's weaknesses. It is only Peter who needs to be reminded! What gentle delight it must have been to Jesus to stretch out his saving hand and pull Peter up! ■

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



In today's gospel, we are presented with the account of Jesus walking on the water of the lake.

This story is a beautiful icon of

the faith of the Apostle Peter. In the voice of Jesus who tells him: "Come!", he recognizes the echo of the first encounter on the shore of that very lake, and right away, once again, he leaves the boat and goes toward the Teacher. And he walks on the waters! The faithful and ready response to the Lord's call always enables one to achieve extraordinary things. But Jesus himself told us that we are capable of performing miracles with our faith, faith in him, faith in his word, faith in his voice. Peter however begins to sink the moment he looks away from Jesus and he allows himself to be overwhelmed by the hardships around him. But the Lord is always

there, and when Peter calls him, Jesus saves him from danger. Peter's character, with his passion and his weaknesses, can describe our faith: ever fragile and impoverished, anxious yet victorious, Christian faith walks to meet the Risen Lord, amid the world's storms and dangers.

And the final scene is also very important. "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God!'" All the disciples are on the boat, united in the experience of weakness, of doubt, of fear and of "little faith". But when Jesus climbs into that boat again, the weather suddenly changes: they all feel united in their faith in him. All the little and frightened ones become great at the moment in which they fall on their knees and recognise the Son of God in their Teacher. How many times the same thing happens to us! Without Jesus, far from Jesus, we

feel frightened and inadequate to the point of thinking we cannot succeed. Faith is lacking! But Jesus is always with us, hidden perhaps, but present and ready to support us.

This is an effective image of the Church: a boat which must brave the storms and sometimes seems on the point of capsizing. What saves her is not the skill and courage of her crew members, but faith which allows her to walk, even in the dark, amid hardships. Faith gives us the certainty of Jesus' presence always beside us, of his hand which grasps us to pull us back from danger. We are all on this boat, and we feel secure here despite our limitations and our weaknesses. We are safe especially when we are ready to kneel and worship Jesus, the only Lord of our life. This is what our Mother, Our Lady always reminds us. We turn to her trustingly. ■

TALKING POINTS

1. Sr Sue points out that Peter becomes the archetype of the follower of Jesus: strong and loyal in his love for Jesus, but often weak in faith and courage. Can you relate to this experience in your own faith journey?
2. Pope Francis shows how we can see a powerful image of the Church: a boat braving storms and sometimes seemingly on the point of capsizing. In what ways do you see the relevance of this image today, and trust in God's reaching-out to us, the Church, to take his hand and trust him as the storms rage around us?

PRAYER POINTS

Pray for Each Other: Ask about and pray for the needs of the group members. Individuals might pray for themselves or ask someone else to pray for them.

Response: *We take courage in you Lord, our eyes fixed on you as you reach out to save us.*

Reflect: : In what way might Jesus be inviting you to step out of the boat, inviting you to trust him and grow in faith, by taking a risk, but with your eyes firmly on him?

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, master of all things, we give permission for you to ignite the gifts of the Holy Spirit you have given us. In particular we ask for the gift of faith and courage to hear your voice and respond boldly to your call. Amen.