

## GOSPEL

MARK 4:35-41

With the coming of evening, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?' They were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

## A REFLECTION BY FR FRANCIS J MOLONEY SJ

After the parables about the silent and inevitable growth of the kingdom of God, as evening approaches, Jesus and the disciples set out for the other side of the lake. An important feature of Mark's Gospel must be kept in mind whenever Jesus sets out across the lake of Galilee. Whenever a crossing takes place, Jesus leaves Jewish territory and goes into a Gentile land. The crossing into a Gentile land encounters difficulty as Jesus and his disciples make their way. They are buffeted by the storm to such an extent that the boat was filling up. There is a real danger that they will sink.

For the first time in Mark's story of Jesus, the disciples become active. Thus far they have been called (see 1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:13-19) and they have been with Jesus, witnessing his words and actions. Yet, despite all they have seen and heard, the disciples show that they do not fully understand. What is more, they have not appreciated the seriousness and dignity of the task in which they have been involved. They reprimand the sleeping Jesus: 'Master, do you not care?'

The reader knows that this is an outrageous question. The dialogue

between Jesus and the leper comes immediately to mind: 'If you want to, you can cure me ... 'Of course I want to! Be cured!' The group gathered in the boat on this stormy night is a more intimate group to Jesus than the wandering leper. Jesus' care for the barque of the Church, carrying himself and his followers on its mission from Israel into the Gentile lands, is greater than one can imagine. But the disciples, in difficulty, suggest that Jesus does not care. The disciples of Jesus of all times have sometimes been tempted to ask him the same question.

The calming of the waters is told briefly, but Jesus' authority is clear. He stands, rebukes and commands: 'Quiet now! Be calm!'. Nature responds immediately. Behind the brief remark of the storyteller, 'and all was calm', lies a wealth of Old Testament images which were associated with YHWH as the creator and the Lord of creation (see especially Ps 65:7; 89:9; 105:6-7; 107:25-32). Jesus' authority over the waters is startling proof that God is once again reigning over his creation. The kingdom of God is here.

What a contrast there is between the presence of God's kingdom in Jesus, the forces of nature which respond to this presence, and the disciples who do not. Jesus takes this occasion to rebuke them. They have already been the recipients of so much: they have been specially called to follow Jesus and have been learning at the school of his words and actions. But they do not believe. Jesus' question strikes at the heart of the problem: 'How is it that you have no faith?'

They still do not believe. Despite the rebuke and the searching question from Jesus, their little faith is still with them as they ask: 'Who can this be?' The mission of the Church is entrusted to subsequent disciples of Jesus, but so often we lose courage in the face of storms and difficulties. The example of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark, doubting Jesus' care for them and wondering who he might be, warns us to place our trust in the one who calls us and journeys with us always.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- In your life, how have you tried to "cross over to the other side" of the lake to take the Good News of the Gospel to those that may not have heard it?
- Are there storms in your life that you need Jesus to command, "Quiet now! Be calm!" If you feel comfortable, would you share this with the group?
- In your journey, have you ever felt like saying to God, "do you not care?" What helped you in this situation?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.