

In an age of air transport across oceans far fewer travelers experience storms at sea than in the times of our grandparents and those before them. But you do not have to be on a transatlantic liner, naval destroyer, or cargo transport ship to know the fearsome threat of water when the wind stirs up the waves. It can happen in a fishing boat on the Bay as it happened on the Sea of Galilee in today's gospel.

If you have been in a storm in a boat or ship you can appreciate the poetic description of its effect in the responsorial psalm 107: "God's command raised up a storm wind which tossed its waves on high. They mounted up to the heaven; they sank to the depths: their hearts melted away in their plight. They cried to the Lord in their distress; from their straits he rescued them. He hushed the storm to a gentle breeze, and the billows of the sea were stilled."

Sister water covers the greater part of the earth's surface and is essential for life that began in it. When we bless water for baptism and for the renewal of our baptismal promises, we rehearse all the good qualities of it. St. Francis sings of it in his canticle that is so beautifully illustrated on side altar here in the Cathedral.

"Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and clouds and storms, and all the weather,
through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

"Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure."

We joyfully sing that with him though we also know its destructive powers and that some human activity has and is contaminating its purity.

As written in the Book of Genesis: "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters." As the story of creation continues, "God separates the waters into those on the earth and those in its dome, the sky. Then God said let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear. And so it happened."

Psalm 104 written in praise of God the Creator describes it this way: "You fixed the earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever. With the ocean, as with a garment, you covered it; above the mountains the waters stood. At your rebuke they fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight. As the mountains rose, they went down the valleys to the place you had fixed for them. You set a limit they may not pass, nor shall they cover the earth again."

Psalm 29 praises God's majesty and power revealed in storms: "The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over the vast waters." These are all reminders that God is the maker and master of the forces of nature in creation as he reminded Job in our first reading. If in the beginning all earth's forces worked together in harmony and for the good of the whole, after man's sin everything changed. St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but by him who once subjected it, not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from the slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freed of the children of God. Yes, we know that all creation groans, and is in agony even until now."

We hear about that all too often in news of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, floods, and tornadoes. We also hear a lot about people in danger at sea these days. Refugees and asylum seekers from Africa and

from Burma risk their lives in hazardous water crossing in order to find a safer place to live. For them storms are not the only hazard. It is the unseaworthiness of the craft and the overcrowding that causes the loss of so many lives. Whatever their religion, I am sure that they pray like Jesus disciples: "Doesn't it matter to you, my creator God, that we are going to drown?" We rightly pray for all of them that the God of us all bring them safely to welcome shores.

These earthly journeys and the awesome forces of nature become metaphors for life's journey. Whether by land or by sea, on pilgrimage or voyage, we will encounter storms of infidelity, division, hate, rebellion, despair that cause us to cry out to Jesus: Where are you? You said you would be with us always. He is here and not asleep. He is here with us gathered as members of his mystical body. He is here in the word that was proclaimed. Above all he is here in the spotless victim, the Lamb of God, the most pleasing sacrifice we can offer our God, the gift of his only Son, our Savior in the consecrated bread and wine. We can invite him to take command of the stormy life within and around us, to speak his calming word, and reassure each of us of the liberating power of his transforming love. To him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honor, praise, glory and thanksgiving now and forever.
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