

A man was fishing from his boat on a river when a bad storm came up. The storm was so strong that it blew his boat against the rocks along the shore and the boat sank. The man was swept down the river in the strong current and he realized that he would soon be swept over a waterfall that was several hundred feet high. There was no way that he would survive if he went over the waterfall.

So he began to pray, "God, I know that I have not been a good person, but if you save me from this river I promise I will mend my ways. I will pray every day, go to church every Sunday, and give half my income to the poor." Just as he finished his prayer and right before he was going to go over the waterfall, lightning struck a tree along the shore and it fell across the river. The man grabbed hold of the tree, climbed out of the river, looked up to heaven, and said, "Never mind. I saved myself."

Often, we can be like that fisherman, not recognizing that the Lord is at work in our lives, guiding us safely through all the stormy waters we encounter. We can also feel like the disciples in today's gospel, who were caught in stormy waters while the Lord was seemingly far away from them. We may wonder if the Lord is going to do anything for us, or we may even believe that the Lord is ignoring us or even has abandoned us, leaving us alone to face the stormy times of our lives: the loss of a loved one, a serious diagnosis or an upcoming surgery, family issues, job or money struggles, drug problems, planning a

wedding during these times of Covid-19, or whatever else is currently rocking our boats.

But today's gospel helps to illustrate that our Lord does indeed care for us. Right before this gospel takes place, Jesus learned of the death of his cousin John the Baptist. He was filled with loss and grief. He just wanted to be alone. So, he gets in a boat by himself to travel to a deserted place. The crowds follow Jesus and his boat from the shore. When Jesus disembarked from the boat, he did not say, "Get away from me! You people are ruining my alone time, my 'me' time." But Matthew says, "***His heart was moved with pity for them.***" Jesus then cured all their sick. He spent time giving them faith, hope, and love, even as he himself was grieving the loss of a loved one. When the disciples asked Jesus to dismiss the crowds because of their hunger and there was not enough food for them to eat, Jesus took five loaves and two fish and fed all five thousand.

The crowd was not a number to him. The crowd was not an interruption to him. These were individual people worthy of life, worthy of his time, and worthy to be fed physically and spiritually. Our Lord feels the same about us. We are never an interruption to him. We are important to him and he makes sure we have all that we need. It's hard for us to imagine Jesus as the skipper of a ship, but Jesus is our skipper. It is he who will guide us through the stormy waters. We need to make sure that he is the captain of our ship. All we need to do is to follow closely behind him just as the crowds did.

In today's gospel, Jesus sends the disciples off in the boat he was piloting, while he dismisses the crowds and then spends some time alone in prayer. But several miles offshore the disciples are struck with heavy winds and terrible waves. Matthew says that Jesus came toward the disciples on the sea "during the fourth watch of the night," which is between 3AM and 6AM. See what kind of response you get from AAA if you are having problems with your vehicle at that hour! But in the middle of the night Jesus walks on the choppy waves of the sea on which the disciples' boat is being tossed to rescue them. The disciples didn't have to pray, cry out, use a cellphone, call OnStar, or use a bat signal. Jesus knew they needed help without being asked. Jesus looks out for them. He walks the same choppy sea the disciples' boat was on to get to them. It was difficult for the disciples during the storm and they were in a boat. Imagine how much more difficult it was for Jesus who was walking on the choppy waves of the sea during the storm, without a boat, a surfboard, or anything. But Jesus does anything for his disciples, and for us, no matter how dangerous or difficult, even to the point of death on the cross. No matter how hard we are being tossed about in the stormy seas of our lives, our Lord is right alongside of us, and he will catch us when we begin to sink. The captain of our ship doesn't even need a ship to save us from the waves and choppy seas of our lives.

It's not easy to have a strong faith, especially during times of extreme difficulty and loss, did someone say 2020? We are going to have fear like the disciples, we are going to cry out like Peter, we are

going to be people of little faith, and so often the tiny whispering sound that Elijah recognized in today's first reading as the voice of God is drowned out by the crashing waves, heavy winds, earthquakes, and fires that are happening in our lives. But that tiny whispering sound of the voice of God created the universe and each one of us by simply saying the word. That Word became flesh and died on the cross that each of us might live. That Word can be the captain of our ship, guiding us through the waves and choppy seas of our lives, and that Word is in the center of the storm with us! Our Lord is with us to care for us, rescue us, and give us life everlasting.

Rejoice and be glad!