

Dear Parishioners,

I remember when I first learned how to swim. I had no fear of the water in the pool. But when my family first went swimming at a lake near my grandmother's house, I wouldn't venture much beyond the water knee-deep. As the water got deeper, it got colder and thinking back, the deep water really frightened me. It is interesting to watch children learning to swim. When he or she is paying attention to the instructor and looking toward that person with confidence, the child tends to do well – first floating, then stroking, then beginning to move forward in a splashy swim. But if fright takes over, the child instinctively reaches out a hand to the instructor. The instructor is the solid body of protection ... help ... rescue from seeming peril. In this weekend's Gospel, Jesus is the solid body of salvation.

The unfolding series of events in the Gospel brings into sharp contrast divine action and human response... divine trustworthiness and human doubt ... divine power and human weakness. When these contrasts clash, those who give themselves over to divine action are saved. Those who rely on their own human response often face serious harm or even death. This clash is evident within Peter. When he looks to Jesus and trusts Him, he walks on water. When he looks away from Jesus to the frightening wind and waves, he begins to sink. All of Jesus' disciples must deal with this inevitable clash. We must all choose where to look. Where we look is a matter of Life or death.

Our discipleship is not only about continuing Jesus' saving work. Discipleship is also about our fulfilling the command Jesus gives to all of us to come to Him and be saved ... to look only to Him to be the solid body that protects and saves. Indeed, in the very coming to Jesus for salvation we are exercising the basic work of discipleship ... furthering the Kingdom of God ... a reign in which all are one with Jesus and the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. We usually think of discipleship as only reaching out to others ... and it surely is that. This weekend's Gospel, however, opens up for us another and prior dimension of discipleship – we must first reach out to Jesus and be grasped by His saving hand. By this utter intimacy of relationship – reaching out, touching, being saved – we are in unique relationship with Jesus, a relationship that enables us to be His risen Presence to others in our world and to carry forward His saving mission.

In order to see Jesus (and ourselves) as the saving Presence of God, we need the one thing that Peter lacks in the story – faith. Faith enables us to see Jesus for who He is – not a ghost, but our “‘Lord’ who is truly ... the Son of God.” And even while we are still lacking faith, Jesus reaches out His hand to save us. It is only our faith that enables us to walk on the sea of life, to hear Jesus' call, and to venture out ourselves onto those raging waters. We will not sink in our faithful discipleship if we look to Jesus for our strength and protection. In this way – looking only and constantly to Jesus – even the raging seas and driving winds of life cannot stop us from answering Jesus' command, “*Come.*”

Our dying (being frightened, sinking, crying out for help) and our rising (being saved, acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God, bowing down in worship) place us alongside Peter out there on the raging sea of life, beckoned by Jesus to come to Him. It's far easier to come to Jesus in the obvious things, for example, faithful attendance at Mass or keeping Lent well. It's far more difficult to see God in the little things, for example, being pleasant with a telemarketer, or giving back to a cashier too much change, or giving extra time to be present to spouse or children. One challenge of this weekend's Gospel is to recognize God's saving acts in the goodness we share in our daily living. This is how we answer Jesus' call to come to Him and to be saved. This is how we constantly look only to Jesus.

May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always! May you and your families be well and safe! Have a great week!

~ Fr. Larry