

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Today’s gospel reading begins with an important word: **Immediately**. “*Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.*” Immediately after what? Well, immediately after what we heard about last Sunday: the miraculous feeding of the 5,000. After everyone ate their fill and the leftovers were collected, immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. No time to celebrate this miracle, or to relax and enjoy what just happened. Immediately they are sent across the Sea of Galilee.

I point this out because this word is an important part of this story, and because it reminds us of how life actually works. A lot of the big changes in our life, good or bad, happen immediately.

It can be a good thing – as when a family member calls you with exciting news, or you find you have won the lottery. These are often life-changing events, and even though they are positive, they happen immediately. And immediately, our life is changed.

These can also be unwelcome events, of course, that happen immediately – like an illness or accident, or the death of a loved one. And then, almost immediately, it seems to have taken over our world and our lives.

In the case of the disciples in this gospel reading, the change they experienced was at the command of Jesus, but that doesn’t make it any easier. They are asked to leave Jesus, right after he has performed this miracle. And when they do, they find themselves, almost immediately, on a boat being battered by the waves, far from land, with the wind against them.

And we have all been there. We have all been caught in one of life’s storms, being battered by circumstances beyond our control, far from the safety of land, with the wind and seemingly everything else against us. We all have our turn in this particular boat, usually when we least expect it. None of us gets through this life completely un-battered and unscathed.

And very often these storms come at us immediately, without warning. When they do, it is worth remembering this story, and very much worth remembering the two other times that the word “immediately” shows up in this story, both of which teach us something important about our Christian life.

Walking on Water

The next time that the word “immediately” occurs is when Jesus is walking on the water to his disciples. It is a famous part of this story that many people, even outside the church, have heard about – Jesus walking on the water. Of course, some of those people may not know the *reason* for Jesus walking water. And the reason is simple: Jesus wanted to be with his disciples. They are caught in this terrifying storm, and Jesus doesn’t want them to be alone. So, he walks out to them. It’s a simple but important detail that this story teaches us: that whenever we are caught in one of life’s storms, we can trust that we are not alone.

Jesus is with us. We are never alone in that boat. God’s Son, our Lord and Savior, is always with us. That is his promise. He may not immediately calm every storm, but he is with us in the midst of every single one of them. He is with us in the storm; he is with us on the boat. When in our life we feel battered by the waves, and far from the safety of land, with the wind blowing strongly against us, that is when we can be assured that Jesus is with us.

The disciples, though, are not immediately comforted by seeing Jesus walking on the water to them. In fact, they are terrified, thinking that they are seeing a ghost. And so they cry out in fear. And that is exactly when the word “immediately” shows us again. The disciples cried out in fear, and immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

There is an important teaching here about prayer. When life’s storms hit, we can cry out to the Lord in fear, and the Lord will immediately answer that prayer. Being afraid doesn’t mean that we don’t have faith. There is nothing wrong with being afraid. Our Lord wants to hear from us when we are afraid. Cry out in fear when life’s storm hits, but make it a prayer. Cry out to the Lord, and he will immediately answer your prayer. Take heart, Jesus says. It is I. Do not be afraid.

A Request from Peter

But that is not the end of the story. Because now enters our favorite disciple, Peter. In response to seeing Jesus walking on the water, Peter makes a very strange request. “Lord,” he says, “if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” So, Jesus obliges, saying simply: “Come.” Peter gets out of the boat, and starts walking on the water toward Jesus! And Peter seems to do this very well, until he notices the storm. Then he becomes frightened and begins to sink.

Now, the storm was there the whole time. So was the water. And so was Jesus. So what changed? Peter’s faith, right? What else is there? That’s the only thing that changed. He began to doubt. He took his eyes off of Jesus. He looked at the storm all around him, at the wind above him, at the water below him, and he became frightened and started to sink.

Little Faith

Perhaps you’ve had those moments, too. I know that I have. Times when you’ve taken your eyes off of Jesus. Looked around at the storms in your lives, and started to doubt. If so, remember what happens next, because we get one more use of the word, “immediately.” Peter, in a panic, cries out: “Lord, save me!” And Jesus does. Immediately. He immediately reaches out his hand and catches Peter. No rebuke or no punishment. He catches Peter the moment he cries out to Jesus.

This is important, because sometimes, when we are in one of those storms, and forget our faith, we can feel a little guilty, and our guilt can sometimes keep us from crying out to Jesus for help. Jesus wants us to cry out for help whenever we need it, regardless of how faithful or unfaithful we have been lately. And he will immediately catch us.

Now, after he catches us, he might very well confront us about our lack of faith, just as he does with Peter. But not before. It is only after he catches Peter that he says to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

So, if your boat is a little battered right now – and whose isn’t at some point – Take heart. If you feel far away from the safety of land, do not be afraid. And if you have taken your eyes off Jesus, open up those same eyes of faith and see Jesus with you in the midst of that storm. Because he is. He always is. Jesus is with you, on the boat, in the storm, and when you feel like you might be drowning. Jesus is there.

Closing

Today’s gospel reading is a simple story, really, but one we all need to hear, because it reminds us of this simple, glorious truth: that Jesus is with us in the midst of the storms. We can prepare for some of life’s storms. They

don't all hit immediately and unexpectedly. Some are more like hurricanes than tornadoes. But many of the storms of life hit immediately. And when they do, it is good to remember this story. It is good to remember that whenever we cry out in fear to the Lord, he immediately answers our prayers with the promise that he is with us. And when we take our eyes off Jesus and become overwhelmed by what is happening in our life, it is once again good to remember that Jesus will be right there to catch us.

It is no wonder that when all of this was said and done, those in the boat worshiped Jesus, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” That is why we worship, isn't it? To take a moment in the midst of our journey through life, to gather on this little boat called faith, and to worship the one who promises to be with through every storm. Thanks be to God. Amen

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