

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 19th Sunday Ordinary Year A1

Jesus came to apostles walking on the water! Sometime you run across mysteries in the gospel and ask “Why did Jesus do that and not something else?” A guy mentioned to me once that it always puzzled him why, after Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to the apostles **standing on the seashore** after they had backslid and gone back to fishing in the sea. John 21:4 tells that Jesus stood on seashore, baking fish and waiting for them to come in. The guy asked me, “Especially after such a miracle like rising from the dead, why didn’t Jesus walk out on the water to meet them and lead them to shore?” He asked, “Was it because Jesus had holes in his feet, couldn’t stand on water without the water passing through, not holding him up?” I thought, “No, that would have made that an even bigger miracle – to pull that one off-keeping himself afloat even with holes in it! It must have been more important that the apostles come to him to be fed after not catching anything all night without him. But miracle or not, what is most important is simply being with Jesus, following and keeping focused on Him.

Have you ever had this happen? (Maybe often, it sure happened to me again this week.) The phone battery or laptop battery is dying, so we plug it in and let it rest a little while, then come back needing to check something important make a call, and then discover that the other end of cord wasn’t plugged in to outlet or it had come out of the wall! No recharge! Or what is funny about my truck USB port, is that I can plug phone into its charger cord, but if phone is not unlocked, it won’t take any charge at all (or the minute the truck engine is turned off, the charging stops!) That is not all that helpful!

My point in bringing that up is that even though I had given phone time to recharge or reset, but the resting/recharging didn’t happen. And in our gospel today, I see the same thing happening, Jesus had led the apostles to water to rest (to be refreshed), but He cannot make them drink there. It seems like Jesus has put the apostles into ‘time-out’. Really, he knows the apostles need to spend some time alone, away from crowds, and rest. The reading said in Mt 14:22, “Jesus **MADE** the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. I suggest that because they didn’t take full advantage of their ‘time-out’ to recharge, that is why they overreact with such panic and fear (?) when they see Jesus walking on water toward them, and why Peter fails too when he attempts his water-walk to Jesus.

We know that Peter and the apostles are tired. They had just finished a long day of serving the crowds, and feeding over 5,000 people (and necessary cleanup afterward-gather all leftovers, etc). That is some hard work and long day – it needs some rest time afterward. And apparently the apostles don't listen to Jesus' counsel to afterward rest good and spend time alone in the boat being refreshed. Maybe they occupied themselves chatting and keeping one another up re-telling each other old stories, or they were busying themselves trying to figure out how to get ahead, by inventorying the exact amount of bread left over (12 baskets full) and seeking a market to re-sell it off or something). But judging from how they show little to no faith (consumed with crippling fear) when Jesus approaches them on water, that leads me to believe they weren't truly resting and being renewed with their 'little time away' vacation for their souls that Jesus gave them by putting them in the boat, while he dismissed the crowds.

Like Peter being distracted by the wind or waves, the apostles weren't fruitfully spending their 'break-time-out', in prayer focusing on Jesus. Something else was on their hearts/minds to let them be so easily agitated when he appears

So one theme with this gospel is the importance of 'staying focused on Jesus' and taking 'rest periods' of prayer seriously so we can be recharged.

But also as a little scriptural background note, it is interesting to know that a particular theme of Matthew's gospel is that he repeatedly and consistently demonstrates how Jesus parallels and is like Moses but in fact even more than Moses as a great leader or shepherd of His people (and the example of Moses really spoke to the Jewish crowd hearing all of this). For example, Jesus and Moses both narrowly escape death as babies, getting away from murderous kings (Moses in the basket escapes Pharoah's killing spree and Jospheh/Mary escape from Herod's plan to kill all newborns). Also, Jesus and Moses are great teachers giving law to others (Moses and the commandments given on Mt Sinai, and Jesus giving the beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount). Moses and Jesus were both tempted in deserts (Moses and the Israelites fail their test in the desert, but Jesus overcomes his temptation attack by the devil in the desert). And both Moses and Jesus are marvelous wonder-workers. Specifically related to today's gospel, remember that Moses led the Israelites through the miraculously opened path of the parted Red Sea and that Moses fed them with the miracle bread of manna, but we see Jesus actually calm the seas and tread up on the water's surface right

after He had performed the miracle of multiplication of loaves and fishes feeding over 5,000 people. And just last weekend, we heard that when Jesus was transfigured on the mountain top, who did HE shine bright over but Elijah and MOSES?

But again, I do not think this gospel is so much about miracles, as it is about the leadership of Jesus. He is The Shepherd leader (who Ps 23 tells us he will lead us to good pastures (feed) us and to the refreshing, replenishing waters). But we have to stay focused on Him. And I like to say that Jesus is the best shepherd and that like all good leaders, He never asks us to do anything that He Himself has not already done or continues to do for us., (For example, He tells us to forgive and He always forgives-even at the cross He is forgiving what is still being done to Him! Also, He tells us to serve others and what does He do, but he washes feet. He tells us to be humble and He steps away from the crowds and tells people not to advertise and blab about their healings to everyone. And especially from today's readings, Jesus tells His disciples to pray and take time alone with God, and He does that too (often He steps away from hectic work and busy-ness to reset and commune with the Father). Our gospel shows a great example of Jesus' leadership, practicing what he preached to the apostles (*if they had just taken it to heart! -They will later. They just aren't there yet*). Jesus models the importance of taking time away from chaos and slowing down or stopping so that we can realign our gears and synchronize our souls with God, our greater purpose. We have to give time to recharge and be refreshed with Jesus in prayer. We must keep focused on Jesus and reconnect with God to be restored and renewed. Prayer alone with and focused on Jesus can do this – we need a daily reset period of prayer in our schedules, and of course, at least a weekly, (here) ay mass we find the time to have our spiritual resources (batteries) recharged. Jesus provides this rest and recovery period for us, if we keep to it and stay focused on Him.