

St Pius-St Anthony 19th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

What a day! After a full day of Jesus teaching and healing last week, at the end of the day, we heard about Jesus' miraculous feeding of over 5,000, and I guess after the dishes were taken care of (apostles gathering up baskets-12 for leftovers), Jesus relaxed some with the crowds. But He then called it a day, and had the apostles load up a boat and push out to sea, while he goes up the mountain to pray alone. Matthew 14:23 says, he "*went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone.*" I mentioned last week that when Jesus takes these moments (give me a moment) alone, we can count on something big following. So look out, here it comes: Another miracle of Jesus-walking on the water! Jesus goes to His troubled apostles, not sitting in a dinghy in the water, but topside He is walks to them upright on the water! Just visualize that: including the detail Matthew gives us that Jesus comes to them after the apostles have pushed out 1) over two miles from shore (so it's safe to bet they had no horizon fixed point) and Matt 14:24 says the 2) waves were tossing them, wind against the boat. So under those conditions, Jesus approaches them on the water (not on a wind surf board or mini catamaran) but just Himself, feet planted on moving water (keep in mind too, that with the tossing waves, I imagine him walking forward, uphill and downhill in the waves--- the 'ghost part may have been the appearing and disappearing sight of Jesus amid the rising and falling of waves with crashing mist thrown in). Maybe that is where the 'fear and terrified' part comes in for the apostles. This fear part reaction of the apostles surprises a lot of close readers of this text, because you would think they feel relief like, "Oh good, Jesus get in with us." But it says they cry out fearfully, 'It is a ghost'. I really don't understand their reaction. I wonder if they think they are having a nightmare, saying like "Oh it must be something that we ate--causing a night terror." But wait, what had they eaten? We best not blame Jesus' miracle fish sandwiches for their nightmare from indigestion. But maybe because of the tossing about in the waves, it led their stomachs to upset, as if they may toss their cookies-okay toss biscuits! But what another miracle of Jesus, to walk on water! Thinking of the Old Testament miracles of

Moses in the desert, the only way to top his mystery manna appearing in the mornings and the parting of the Red sea, would be for Jesus to create His own bread in front of people and to walk up on top of the water right through the waves. (No need to part the water and wait for it to subside or sidestep you, just walk right through it) Matthew has Jesus here top any and all of the mighty wonders of the Old Covenant and Moses. And Peter has some sense of this greatness of Jesus (His divinity) because he challenges Jesus to demonstrate His identity further by having him join the miracle. (This is a Thomas doubting moment for Peter too; as Thomas said, "I won't believe until I touch you, Peter is saying 'I won't believe until I walk like you-prove yourself'"). But, give Peter credit for the boldness of his request. He tries. And his first steps are great. But, then the scripture says it was the wind, but Peter also felt the water rising up on him, (that sinking feeling), and he cried out for help. But I give Peter credit again, because he knew what to do when he was getting in over his head. Peter knew who to call- "Jesus save me." Maybe he could have been more prudent about not jumping in over his head. Peter will learn, slowly, but still learn. Though I think Peter offers us the best lesson from this reading. We need to keep eyes (our hearts) focused only on Jesus. Lock on to Jesus and hold. If He is our dedicated view, then everything is going to work out. Hebrews 12:1-2 says we are to, "persevere in running the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus". It makes sense, when fear overtakes us, or anxiety blows in to shake us, if Jesus is ever before us- He is our horizon fixed point and 'sole' focus, then guess what, but that everything storming or stressing around us is going to subside. God has it.

Locking in to a single track focus on one thing really does keep us calm and carry us through things. Have I ever told you of the World Youth Day trip to Denver back in 1993? We saw the Saint alive in the flesh, Pope John Paul II. It was tremendous, but one of our daytime side trips taught me a great lesson too. We went over to Canyon City CO, to experience the Royal Gorge: a huge valley pit between two mounts that has about a three football field length span across a 1,000 foot drop. I was a chaperone so kids in my group wanted to ride the cable car across the span, and I thought sure, so as we got to the loading area, I

happened to see the car swing in the wind, and I thought 'I may not make it across, and then what do we have 7-8 students with a passed out chaperone', so I said, "You all get in and I am going to walk across the bridge beside you and wait on the other side to greet you as you get out." Well, it didn't get much better walking across that wood slat deck, the wind still blew on you, and crossing the expanse, I lost another of the chaperones with me on the way over. As we talked and walked, he started acting squirrely, and suddenly a lady got her heel or something caught in/on a board and she suddenly grabbed the railing (not at all close to falling over, but that was my friends' end. He almost ran the rest of the way-he didn't respond to my voice calling to him). But I discovered that even walking that cable bridge with wood deck slats (spaces between them) wasn't so bad if you focused on and smiled looking at the people's faces and heads that were walking toward you. Keeping that focus, the sweat would dry from my palms! And this is the same focus that brings Peter to be fearless enough to step out of the boat, but also to be able to walk firmly on the shifting watery sea. He looked at the face of Jesus and kept Jesus as his horizon fixed point. So we also need to stay completely focused on Jesus, eyes on Him, always thinking of Him, repeating His words to ourselves and letting His name be always on our lips. He is our lasting, still-point in any storm.