

## Transcending Sinking Thinking

August 9, 2020, Nineteenth Sunday In Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 14:22-33  
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Certainly when dramatic things happen in our lives such as natural disasters, weather events or say, bomb blasts such as what we saw in Beirut this week or global pandemics which are all experiencing ongoing right now, we are all inclined to ask what does God mean by this when they do happen.

Or maybe it's the loss of a loved one or a sudden change of lifestyle due to an accident or illness.... such events also prompt us to ask what God means by all of it.

Often such events have the power to wake us up to re-organizing our lives and to ask the question what is really important in my life?

These events become reminders of our mortality and often bring us to embrace our loved ones more closely and become more thankful for what we do have. Many would say, 'God speaks through such dramatic events.'

In our first reading today Elijah is prompted to 'go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' And as he waits, the writer anticipates our human inclination - - that God will announce Himself in a very dramatic way.

Yet, it was the ***sound of sheer silence*** that prompted Elijah to wrap his face in his mantle and go out and stand at the entrance of his cave.

Whether it is *the traumatic event* or the *sound of sheer silence*, God has a way of reaching us and affecting us and our decision making.

But what is it about the silence in particular that informs us about the way God communicates to us?

Dramatic events shake us up and even at times, traumatize us - - ask anyone who has PTSD from a traumatic event in their lives. The ramifications are deep and for many, permanent. Unfortunately these ramifications can often be life changing and sadly, in a negative way.

Other dramatic events, ones less personally traumatic, affect us for a while but often have no real staying power. I remember when 911 happened, I noticed attendance in churches increased significantly....for a while. The world was changed permanently, but how many hearts were permanently changed for the better?

What gives us the staying power, to stay focussed on the deep reality of our relationship with God.... the transforming relationship that permanently changes us and transforms the way we see our God, the way we see the world, the way we see each other, and the way we see ourselves?

...the way Jesus intends.

Perhaps the beginnings of a solution is arrived at through paying attention to what we are thinking at any given time, what we immerse ourselves in our daily activities, and where we find our center.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus has just sent his apostles off on a boat ahead of him while he dismisses the crowds following the feeding of the five thousand.

The Gospel then says he went off **by Himself** to pray. It suggests He needed to be alone with the Father. He needed the silence. He needed to re-center Himself, away from all distractions. Some suggest that He also needed to get away to grieve John the Baptist who had just been beheaded. Jesus had not yet the time to grieve him. Also, remember in John's Gospel, the people wanted to take Him by force and make Him king, '**so he withdrew to the mountain by Himself.**'(John 6:15)

As our Gospel says, it was near morning when they saw Jesus appearing as a ghost walking across the water towards them.

Matthew and John both give an account of Jesus walking on water but it is only Matthew that gives the account of Peter being invited to come to Jesus on the water.

The disciples are initially afraid but Jesus says, **Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**'

Peter responds, **Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'**

Jesus says, '**Come.**'

Sounds easy.

And, it sounds like it worked....at first,....but very quickly Peter's attention was diverted to the world and the elements and the 'what if's.'

There is a word that describes when we focus on all the things that can go wrong when we are preparing to take on something new. **Catastrophizing.**

How often do we let the 'what if' thinking get in the way of our trust in God?

At one level we do believe and trust that things will be OK and that God will take care of us. And perhaps there are events in our lives that fortify or strength that belief. But how is that faith and trust sustained? And how deep is that trust? How quickly the world and its ways still get in the way. We can very much relate to Peter, in that we hear the words *do not be afraid* and initially act on them but the focus and staying power and absolute trust are still lacking.

We are still susceptible to sinking.

Jesus' deeper sense of oneness with the Father allowed Him to walk on the water, to stay above distractions, doubts and fears of the world.

One cannot help but think also that the time Jesus took to pray after the feeding of the five thousand, helped restore him and re-center him in his identity and mission. It is interesting to think that Jesus, in his humanity, was not immune to becoming a little bit frazzled by it all.

Amidst the storms and choppy waters of this world, the Lord stands before us on the water inviting us to come. But we are like Peter wanting to trust but still deeply affected by the world and the wind and the rain and the storms. And don't forget our pride and ego, which is an interior distraction.

Remember that often, the Lord's invitation is most evident in the silence, away from the drama of the world's distractions. At face value, Jesus' invitation may seem impossible by the world's standard, but all things are possible with Him. He wasn't testing Peter's faith but inviting Peter to exercise it.

Our focus and meditation on Christ and his teachings, our receiving Him in every possible way, to fill our lives with Him, is the path to permanent transcendence of the doubts and fears of this world. So as we continue to ponder God's Word and receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, may we be buoyed up and deepen our resiliency in the face of doubt and fear.