



9TH SUNDAY OF MATTHEW AUGUST 14

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 14:22-34

[Walking on Water]

At that time, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them. And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But immediately he spoke to them, saying "Take heart, it is I; have no fear."

And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus; but when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they entered the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret.

THE SERMON

After feeding thousands of people with just five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

dismisses the crowds and even His disciples, and He stays behind on the mountain, alone, to pray at night. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, but He takes on our human nature to unite it with His Divine Nature. He heals our humanity by uniting it to His Divinity. The Lord Jesus Christ, Who created the heavens and the earth, and holds all things in the palm of His hands in His divine love, finds time to be alone with the Father to pray. We imitate Christ in all things, especially when we come to God in prayer. As the Lord Jesus takes time for Himself, alone, for prayer and contemplation, so He teaches us to take time for ourselves for prayer and contemplation.

In the meantime, the disciples have taken the boats to cross the Sea of Galilee to the western shore, towards the region of Capernaum. Many skilled fishermen, such as Peter, James, and John, navigate the Sea of Galilee constantly. However, this night, the wind was too strong. It is late and dark, and it is the "fourth watch of the night," which means between 3 am and 6 am. They are afraid, especially because the Lord Jesus is not in the boat with them.

The Lord Jesus shows that He is greater than Moses as He had fed thousands of people in the desert by multiplying the five loaves and the two fish. Now, once again, He calls to mind familiar Old Testament disclosures of God. When the Israelites left Egypt by the command of God, they reached the Red Sea. At that time, the Lord God told Moses to stretch out his staff so the Sea could be parted, and the Israelites crossed safely to the other side.

That event also happened right before the daybreak, after a strong wind blew all night (Exodus 14). Here, the Lord Jesus is fulfilling the conquering of the Sea, not by parting it with a staff, but by walking on its water. He is also fulfilling the Psalm, which, speaking of God, says, "Those who go down to the sea in ships . . . cried to the Lord in their affliction, and He commanded the storm, and it became a breeze, and its waves were still . . . Let them give thanks to the Lord for His mercies" (Psalm 106).

The Lord Jesus walks across the water and comes to His disciples. In the Old Testament, the waters of the sea often serve as a symbol of death and new life emerging. Now, the Son of God comes to help His disciples, to deliver them from death, to be with them, to calm the storm, and to cross with them to the other side. The Lord was not in the boat when the storm arose, but He was still with them because He knew everything and was praying. He tests their faith, but He knows exactly when to come to them in their hour of need.

This is also true in our lives. We are on a journey to the Kingdom of God. We sail across the sea of this life, and even if we are experienced sailors, it is inevitable that, at times, the winds will blow against us, and the waves will threaten to sink us. It might, sometimes, feel as though the Lord is not with us because we are only focusing on the danger; we are focusing on the trial. However, the Lord is always with us. He lives inside our hearts, He knows all things, and He loves us infinitely. Christ tramples death by death

and, therefore, tramples on the waves which threaten to drown us. He walks on them. He is victorious over them.

Christ's victory over the storm is our victory. If our focus is on Him, we also walk securely over the waves and the storms of life, not because we have any power to do so on our own, but because He gives us His strength when we ask. He says to us, "Come!" The Lord Jesus reveals Himself as the God of Heaven and Earth, of the seas and all that is in them. Christ is the Lord of the natural elements, earth, water, fire, and air. He is the Lord of life; He rules over all things and loves us unconditionally.

Sometimes, like Peter, we go to Christ feeling strong and full of faith, but other times our faith falters because we take our gaze off Christ. Instead, we begin to focus on the storm around us. When we do that, we fear. When we worry, our faith diminishes, and we begin to sink. However, the Lord does not abandon us, just as He does not let Peter sink. All Peter has to do is to call out to the Lord, saying, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reaches out His hand and catches him, saying, "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?"

The Lord then pulls Peter out of the water and out of his fear. The Lord grabs Peter, much like how we see Him grabbing the wrists of Adam and Eve in the icon of the Resurrection. Their hands are not able to grasp Him, but He holds them up with His firm grip on their wrists, pulling them out of the grave with the power of His life and love.

We pray in the petitions in every service: "Help us, save us, O Lord." The first word in the Greek petition is «αντιλαβού» antilavou, which means "take me by my hand." The Lord Jesus takes Peter by his hand and saves him as he is drowning, and He does the same with us. He answers our prayers when we cry out to Him, and He always helps us. Teaching about prayer, Saint Paisios of Mount Athos says, "I send a signal [prayer], I ask for help. I constantly ask for help from Christ, from Panagia, from the Saints, for myself, and for others. If I do not ask, I will not get helped." The moment we think we have lost everything, including hope, is the time to cry out: "Lord, save me!" And He will reach out His hand to catch us and answer our prayers for whatever is beneficial for our salvation and the salvation of others.

When we accept the love of God and put our trust in Him, then fear begins to disappear. Jesus says to us, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" There is no fear in love because perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). To abide in God's love is to trust in Him, to come to Him in prayer, to spend time alone with Him in communion. When our hearts are open to His love, the storms of life cannot sink us because He is with us. The grace of God brings about faith in our hearts, and with strong faith, we can work miracles through His power and love.

Follow us    @goarchDRE

Subscribe & read other sermons at: religioused.goarch.org