



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time-Year A-August 9th 2020

Readings: 1 Kings 19: 9. 11-13, Psalm 84, Romans 9: 1-5, Matthew 14: 22-33

In Shakespeare's Scottish play the third scene introduces us to three ladies from the Glamis and Cawdor Inter-Faith Forum. We hear them in dialogue as they discuss the fate of men with whose destiny they have maliciously interfered. The First Witch – such an old fashioned judgemental term – remarks of the object of her spite in these immortal words:

'Though his bark cannot be lost, Yet it shall be Tempest tossed.'

According to the helpful notes this means that, 'Although I can't make his ship disappear, I can make his journey uncomfortable.' (So much easier if the Bard had put it as prosaically as that in the first place.) The original line sums up, in a pithy and memorable way, the truth of Man's destiny. The forces of darkness may conspire against us but we need not be lost in the dark ocean of death and chaos. It is so memorable that fifty five years after completing it for O level, when our whole class stood and sang the National Anthem in celebration (our English teacher was a Republican), here I am quoting it to you.

This little line is a good pointer to the Catholic Faith. We believe that God longs for and provides for our salvation, in spite of our follies and foibles and sometime faithlessness. We have no time for depressive, damnable Calvinism with its stingy God just waiting to watch us fail and boil us in mouldy chip fat for all eternity. We believe that, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life'.

But though we know that, we also know that sometimes we have difficulty in acting as if this were true. So today's readings give us great encouragement.

Two of the great heroes of the Faith are seen struggling with holding the Faith in the midst of the struggle and the storm. Elijah is on the run from the murderous Jezebel – an honorary member of the Glamis and Cawdor Ladies Inter-Faith Forum. He is depressed, defeatist, despairing. There are hardly any supporters of the true Faith in the land. The mission has failed. What is the point? Elijah wants to die. There are days like that. What is amazing is that this giant of the Faith has just come from an amazing victory of God over the evil prophets of Baal, the pagan elemental godlet. Elijah has both seen and demonstrated God's overwhelming power. But now the 'black dog' is back. He now doubts the power or intention of God to save the people.

And Peter. Seeing Christ walking on the water, he is frightened and amazed. 'If it really is you, Lord, let me do it too.' And off he sets across the raging sea. So far, so good.

But then rational man takes over. Peter is a fisherman not a fool. He looks at Jesus. He looks at the waves. He does the math. He sinks.

(Commentaries make much of Peter's failure but I would just like to say

in his defence that I didn't notice any of the other guys volunteering to get out of the boat). But what is extraordinary is that, like Elijah, Peter has only just come from witnessing a mighty demonstration of God's power in Christ – the Feeding of the 5000. And yet, in crisis, he still thinks in human rather than supernatural terms.

I am mightily encouraged by the record of the great saints' fragile humanity. Elijah goes on, obediently, to encounter God and fulfil God's plan to anoint the future. Peter goes on to build the Church of Jesus. Both have had their moments of deeply doubting God's capacity for Salvation. Both, having failed, get turned around and get on with the job. The aim of the enemy is to surround us with such terrifying scenarios, death, destruction, the storm god, the waves that threaten to overwhelm our little humanity. This is where we are. The culture is dark. Our numbers are few. Our little ship of the Church is in daily peril. Courage, my friends. In these two stories we are reminded that faithfulness is all too often just having the courage to get on with the job – whatever the circumstances. Trust Him. Get up the mountain and listen to the still small voice. Step out of the boat, ignore the raging storm, and keep looking at Jesus