



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

From the heart of the tempest

Readings: Job 38 v 1 -11, 2 Cor 5 v 14-17, Mark 4 v 35- 41

Of the four elements identified in classical science, Earth, Air, Water and Fire, Man is undoubtedly most at home in the first two Earth and Air.

While the old saw that our bodies are merely a device invented by water for carrying itself around, the truth remains that we are comfortable in our clearly identifiable habitat. 'Earth to earth, dust to dust', we intone over the grave. Our origin becomes, in physical terms, our end.

Whatever the Evolutionist may say, we are happiest and more secure on Terra Firma. Because we are spiritual beings we also identify with the element of Air. It gives both life for the body and is an indicator of our animation by the Spirit, the unseen mover, the sine qua non of life.

In the Christian Faith, however, we go one step further – out of our comfort zone. For we embrace Water, without which we could not live, but as the sign of our dying in Christ through Baptism and rising with Him in glory. To the Hebrew mind, the waters were foundational, primitive, threatening our very being from every side, held in check only by the provisional mercy of God, as at the Red Sea and, in extremis, by the provision of the Ark.

The element of Fire, the key to Man's development and mastery, is both the element of destruction and also the inspirational energy of the Holy Spirit. Fire descends at the Pentecost and, by this same passionate purifier of the Purgatory, we are licked into shape by the fire of God's love – forged anew into pure gold and fit for the Presence.

Today we see the conjunction of three of the elements in the Gospel story. The earthy men, the disciple crew, are embarked with Christ, on the inland waters of the Galilee. Christ is asleep in the stern when the rising wind and troubled waters conspire to threaten the very life of the disciples. A gale is blowing. White horses are breaking over the bow. The running storm is threatening to overwhelm the little craft, swamping the deck faster than the disciples can bale. And still Jesus, exhausted by another powerful day's preaching and healing, sleeps on, apparently unaware of the sudden and terrifying mortal crisis.

The boat is a fishing boat. The Sea is the familiar Galilee. The storm is not unusual except in its ferocity. But the boat is also the Ark, the Ark of Salvation, the Church. The Sea is the great ocean of the world, the throbbing force of untamed elements of chaos and death. The storm is that threat to our very being which war and persecution and the instruments of the enemy raise up against us.

And so it seems, as we panic and try to right the floundering ship of the Church, that Christ, our Captain, our master helmsman, is asleep and unaware and apparently indifferent to our fate. Our little barque is about to go down and with it the hope of all mankind. Everything we have worked for, everything we believed in, soon to be sunk.

The disciples wake the Lord. They ask Him, 'Don't you care?'
Jesus awakes and rebukes the raging elements of wind and water.
The elements are instantly obedient to their Creator.
And Jesus then rebukes the disciples for their lack of Faith.

In many ways that is more of a danger to seaworthiness of the Ship of the Church than the raging elements.

Did they really think that the Ark of Salvation was going down?
Did they truly believe that, with Jesus on board, the Church would be overwhelmed by the rage and fury of the disobedient elements?

We can hear those questions reverberating in our own heads from time to time when it seems like the game is up. No-one wants to believe in Jesus in our benighted society. The powers of sin and death are in their pomp, thrashing over the bows of our little church, threatening our very existence.

We need to understand that, with Christ on board, the ship cannot be lost. For 'even the wind and the waves obey Him.' This monumental and salvific power is the property of God alone.

If we choose to embark on a ship which has not Christ on board, the storm will undo us utterly. If we then panic in the face of the raging of the hostile elements, the forces of the enemy, then indeed we are lost. We are asked to remember that, for all the faithlessness, foolishness and panic of the disciple crew, Christ is on board our little barque and, with Christ on board, it will never be lost. It will rise high on the waters of Chaos and destruction and bring the faithful home to the landfall of

Paradise.

‘Out of the deep I cry unto Thee, O Lord’ we cry the De Profundis at our mortal end, confident that the Lord will awaken to save us. And confident still, that despite its terrible setbacks in our benighted and apostate society and in spite of the follies of sinful men and even our own flimsy faith and existential panic, the Church of God will never succumb to the storm of persecution or the pounding waves of elemental hostility, to the fierce winds of cultural indifference or even militant apostasy. Indeed, the Ark alone will weather the storm for Christ alone holds the power over the elemental forces - and He will not sleep while we are in peril.