

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 20-21, 2009
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Deacon James J. Benjamin

Job: 38: 1-4, 8-11 Psalm 107 2 Cor. 5: 14-17 Mark 4: 35-41

Happy Father's Day!

One Father's Day, a boy came up to his father and said,
in that whiny tone that 8 year-olds know how to use,
"Da-a-a-d, there's a Mother's Day and a Father's Day.
How come there's no Children's Day?"
His dad said, without missing a beat,
"Buddy boy, every day is Children's Day!"

The readings for this weekend
show us the power of God over nature.
No matter how bad the storms get,
how dangerous it might be to be exposed to the weather,
God is there.
He will calm the storms and bring peace to His creation.
The question is whether we really believe that good news,
or are we more like the disciples
who panic and become filled with doubt
when things get tough?

Is our relationship with God strong enough
to keep us going,
even when bad things may be happening to you and me?

Let's look at the readings.
The first one, from the book of Job,
is part of God's response to Job
when he cries out in his need,
having lost everything that was precious to him,
asking God to explain why He allowed it all to happen.
Job was righteous, a good man, and he never allowed his faith in God to waiver.
Yet he questioned, and God answers,
and maybe the answer is not what we'd like to hear.

God is not sympathetic to Job;
He does not apologize for all the misfortunes that have occurred.
Rather, in what sounds a bit callous,
He tells Job that He doesn't have to answer to him.
Where was Job, after all,
when God created the earth and everything in it?
In other words, Job can't possibly know what God has in mind for His creation,
and Job has no right to complain.
God is infinitely knowing and infinitely wise
and can make good come out of anything,

no matter how bad things may appear.

Job, to his credit, remains trusting in God's mercy and love and, in the end, is rewarded beyond his wildest dreams. Job has come through his time of testing and passed with flying colors.

You and I have our time of testing too. Maybe it comes in the form of illness, whether mental or physical. Maybe we suffer financial reverses, or disappointments in the way life has turned out for us. It could be that our children have not turned out the way we had hoped.

We had a different plan in mind when we started out, but somehow the grand goals were never achieved. Maybe we have had to change our definition of success, and perhaps we are no longer sure what the word means.

So we look at our past, and what we have achieved, and what has eluded us, and maybe we feel a bit like Job. We have always tried to live good lives, following the Gospel as best we can, and yet there seems to be a lot missing in the way we experience fulfillment and satisfaction. Do we lose our faith because things have not turned out according to our plans, or can we accept that God still loves us, and has perhaps given us other blessings along the way that have taught us wisdom and mercy and gratitude for what we're received? Can we be like Job, knowing that we can complain to God any time we want, and that He hears our complaint and doesn't love us any less? Can we keep trusting God to be at our side, never deserting us in the midst of all that we suffer through, teaching us patience and calmness; helping us to grow in our humanity and in our ability to endure whatever comes with equanimity, peace and maybe even humor?

Ah, that's the challenge for us from today's readings.

The Gospel picks up on this theme with Jesus, sleeping in the stern of the boat, as the disciples make their way across the Sea of Galilee. He's probably exhausted, having spent the entire day teaching on the lake shore. The Sea of Galilee is not too big, perhaps about three to four times the area of Columbia. It is located in a kind of basin, surrounded by hills which serve to funnel strong winds onto the lake. The disciples, many of whom were experienced fishermen,

knew well that sudden storms could overtake them out on the water.
The one depicted in the Gospel seems to have been a particularly dangerous one,
so that even these expert seamen panicked and thought they were about to drown.
Probably they hesitated to waken Jesus,
knowing how exhausted he was,
but finally they could not take it any longer:
waves are crashing into the boat,
the wind is howling and they have lost control of their craft.
They cry out in their fear to the Lord
who immediately awakens and calms the storm, thus calming their fear.

But then Jesus isn't particularly sympathetic either.
Instead he rebukes his disciples for the weakness of their faith!
Now panic is replaced with confusion, perhaps embarrassment,
certainly amazement and awe.
And they ask themselves,
as we ask ourselves,
"who is this Jesus, that even uncontrollable Nature obeys Him?"

He appears to be someone who will not let us drown,
someone who is in charge even though he appears not to be paying attention.
When the disciples call on him, he responds immediately,
calming their fear and restoring their faith,
and, at the same time, challenging them to be stronger in their faith.

For us who are faced with our own kinds of terrible storms:
failures, fears, doubts, pain of all kinds, suffering for ourselves
and for those we love,
for all of us who are afraid of drowning in one way or another,
can we continue to trust that Jesus is still on board?
Can we continue to keep our faith strong that He will not desert us,
no matter how bad it gets?
Can we keep believing that Jesus is in charge,
and that His plan is much greater than we can possibly understand?
And can we be consoled by the awareness,
that no matter how things turn out,
in the end calm will be restored,
and that we will be at peace to enjoy the fullness of everything that is good?

That is the good news and that is what we must hold onto,
whenever fear and panic are overtaking us.
Jesus is real, He is alive,
and even now His mighty power is bringing us peace and contentment once again.