

It seems that St. Peter has a reputation for always saying or doing the wrong thing. A few examples from the Gospels come to mind: No sooner had Jesus told Peter: “You are the Rock, and upon this rock I will build my church,” then Peter tries to use his authority to forbid Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die. When Jesus was being arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter pulled out a sword and cut off the ear of one of the soldiers. (To let you in on a little secret... Peter wasn't aiming for that guy's ear.) And when Jesus was at his darkest moment, awaiting his execution, Peter denied Him, he denied Him three times.

In today's Gospel, Peter is at it again. When he sees Jesus walking on the water, he asks Jesus to let him try. After a few steps, he begins to sink. Typical St. Peter, right? But for all of Peter's blunders in the Gospels, there is something unique and admirable about him - whatever Peter does, he does it with his whole heart.

The experience of the apostles in that boat was incredible and terrifying. Not only were they out in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of the night (and it's a big lake!)... Not only was there a strong wind tossing the boat upon the waves... But, in the midst of all this, a man comes walking toward them on the water. We have all heard this story so many times that I think this loses its impact. Imagine you are in a boat on Lake Ponchartrain in the middle of the night fighting for your life against the winds and the waves and someone comes walking up to you on the water. Any of us would be terrified!

But then the man speaks. He says, in Greek: “Ego eimi.” In English this can mean simply: “It is I.” But it can also mean: “I AM.” These words that Jesus uses to identify Himself to the apostles are the same words that God used to identify Himself to Moses in the burning bush: “Ego eimi;” “I AM.” The one who was walking on the water toward the apostles’ boat was not a ghost. It was Jesus - the divine Son of God. This miracle of walking on the water was a manifestation to the apostles that Jesus is God.

Now we return to Peter. When he hears Jesus say these words, he immediately commits with his whole heart - “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Even though this request doesn't turn out great for Peter in the end, we should not lose sight of how profound, how full of faith these words were. Notice, none of the other apostles asked Jesus to allow them to walk on water. None of the other apostles were filled with that loving desire to be close to Jesus. Only Peter.

And what happens next is even more amazing. Peter actually walks on water! He steps out of the boat with his eyes fixed on Jesus and he walks on the water! Peter listened to the words of Jesus - Take courage; it is I. Do not be afraid.” And Peter followed these words, at least for a few moments.

There is a very important lesson for us in this story. Who of us has not experienced storms in this life? And not just the physical storms of hurricane and floods. Surely each of us has our own list of storms with which we struggle. Perhaps our storms are financial struggles or losing a job. Maybe we experience tension in our family or a struggling marriage. Sometimes the storms can come from our own addictions or sins. Or perhaps the storms of sickness and death are our particular struggles. Yet in any of these storms of the present life, Jesus is always there! Often, we can be like the disciples who did not recognize the Lord as he approached them. Often, it is hard to find Jesus in the midst of the winds and the waves. But as He seeks us out in the storm, His words to us are the same as they were to the Apostles: “Take courage; it is I. Do not be afraid.”

Here, in the Church, is the place where we can most easily recognize the Lord in the midst of the storms of life. Now, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, is the time when we can see the Lord approaching to bring us courage and strength. Here, in the Eucharist, is where we can hear the Lord say: “Ego eimi; It is I; I AM.” The Lord calls us, like Peter to step out of the boat and come toward Him on the water. In the Eucharist, Jesus allows us to keep our eyes fixed on Him so that the winds and the waves do not overwhelm us.

But, like Peter, sometimes our faith is weak; sometimes we do not keep our eyes fixed on Jesus; sometimes we sin. And here again we see Peter acting with his whole heart. Even as he is sinking beneath the waves, Peter does not despair. Instead he calls out to Jesus: “Lord, save me!” In our lack of faith, in our sin, we, too, have a Savior. Like Peter, we have a merciful Lord who will stretch out His hand and catch us. And we experience this mercy most powerfully in the confessional. When our faith falters, when we fail to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, His mercy and forgiveness are always waiting to save us in the sacrament of reconciliation.

In the storms of life, it can be hard to recognize that Jesus is always present to us. Let us pray that we have the faith of Peter to recognize in Jesus the one who can protect us from the wind and the waves. Let us pray that we have the hope of Peter to know that Jesus is the one who can save us from our sinfulness that causes us to doubt. May we draw close to Christ in the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist so that, in them we may find the courage and strength to be faithful disciples of the Lord.