

'It's a ghost' Mt 14.26

Gospel Reflection for 19th Ordinary Sunday of the Year

Jesus walking on the water and coming to save the disciples seemed to them a ghost. The hand that is extended to them are seen as a hands of a ghost. The steps hurrying to uphold them are seen as feet of a ghost. So often in life people coming to help and to save are seen as enemies. We frequently give ulterior motives to their generosity. Many prefer to die beneath the waves rather than hold the hands that are extended to save.

We often see things not as they are but as we are. We see what we fear. In the midst of fear, in a tossed-about boat the disciples are able to see only the waves, the wind, ghosts and death. Even the hand of God that is extended to save them they fear. Peter needed extraordinary courage to step on the waves and move towards what everyone said was a ghost.

In the town of Gerasenes, the man possessed, pleaded with Christ to leave his shore and go back to where he came from. The people of that place were annoyed at the loss of their pigs and requested Jesus to leave them alone. They feared the one who came to set them free. They preferred their swines and slavery rather than their freedom. Jesus is merciful enough to understand their captivity and slavery and refuses to leave. Unlike Jesus we are often so quick to obey ignorant threatening voices and quit our God-given mission leaving the people in their captivity and slavery.

After the miracle of the loaves, after the people had eaten enough, they were enthusiastic to make Jesus a king. How many politicians would have fanned the popularity wave and declared an election! But not Christ. He knows that the enthusiasm is only as long as the bread lasts. Today they want to make him a king. Tomorrow it will be 'Crucify him'. Rather than prolong their claps and appreciation, Jesus disperses the crowd. First, he packs the leaders of the crowd into a boat and puts them out to the sea. Then he makes his way to the mountaintop to settle the bill and give credit where it belongs.

In the cool of the evening, amidst the pleasant rays of the setting sun, the green mountain top is a beautiful parlour to meet his Father. Evening falls, night comes, and hours pass, yet Jesus goes on talking with his Father late into the night. He has many things to share, many bills to settle, many matters to discern. Unlike so many of us, who after a brief success in our schemes and projects make our way to the beaches and parties, Jesus spends long hours with his Father.

From the mountain top the disciples in the boat are not lost to him. He has a better view of them from the mountain top. He had heard them singing and clapping at the start of their journey, for they had enough of bread. In their excitement and joy, they failed to notice the gathering clouds on the horizon. Soon the sky grew darker, the waves became higher, the wind stronger, the muscles that held the row weaker. They found it more and more difficult to steady their sails, for the wind turned 'against' them.

So long as they can manage the boat Jesus will not go to them. What they can do, he will not do. At the same time, he will not allow them to sink beneath the waves. He will be on time to hold them up. In their

fear, they regret that they had forgotten to invite him in their initial excitement and joy. The beginning was so nice, but midway it's hell let loose!

Making a playground of the ocean and its waves Jesus hurries to them. In their fear their eyes are blurred, and they see the one that had just fed them as a ghost. The waves and winds were bad enough and now they need to handle a ghost too. When things go wrong everything seems to go wrong. So like a helpless baby fallen on the ground, all they can do is cry out in desperation. Like the father who runs to the prodigal son in the far away country, Jesus hurries towards them on the waters.

The journey of life is a journey across the sea. The beginnings are all music and songs. Somewhere midway the waves and the wind are sure to come. Let those who are just beginning, not wonder why those celebrating their Silver and Golden Jubilees are finding it so difficult. Wait for your turn. You don't see the turbulence and the undercurrents. It's calm at the shore, not so in the middle. Those that are toiling the waves and the wind and terrified by ghosts, those who are towards the last leg of their journey, be assured he will come walking on the water and take you to the other shore.

- Fr T.V.George sdb