

HOMILY ~ 12th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

JUNE 22/23, 2024

A number of years ago, I took a trip to Myrtle Beach. One of the things that I like to do when I am at the beach by the ocean is to walk. Hearing the waves and having the water wash over my feet, I find very peaceful and calming. Early one morning, I was walking; and I was about 45 minutes from the motel where I was staying. I had gotten away from the hotels and tourist area, and it was now a residential area. Suddenly a storm came up, as sometimes they do on the ocean. It started to rain, and I wondered what I was going to do. I just sat down on the beach in the pouring rain and observed the thunder and lightning storm over the ocean. Eventually the storm ended, as they always do. It was quite a show. It was a transcendent experience. It was a dangerous, uncontrollable and primitive force. Only God had control over all of this; and not only does he have the power to control the storm, he created all of this out of nothing. The ocean could be calming and peaceful, as well as dangerous and uncontrollable at the same time. It was a mystery. I can tell you about it; but unless you have had similar experience, you do not totally understand the mystery. You have to experience it to understand it.

In the Gospel Reading today, the Apostles were in a boat with Jesus when a storm came up; and Jesus was asleep on a cushion. They were afraid, so they woke Jesus up. They thought Jesus did not care about them. He pointed out their lack of faith, he calmed the sea and the Apostles were filled with awe. The storm represents the storms that we experience in our lives. Sometimes it appears that Jesus is asleep and does not care about us; but that is never true. He is always with us. Sometimes we feel alone in the storm, but Jesus is always with us; and just as the Apostles had each other in the storm, there are probably people that Jesus has put into our lives to be with us during the storm. What about their lack of faith? What is the opposite of faith? Is it doubt? No. The opposite of faith is fear. That is why the Apostles were afraid. It was because they did not have faith. Faith that God would be with them, faith that the people in their lives would help them, faith that this storm will end as storms always do. That is where many of our fears come from. It is a lack of faith.

I have been praying the Serenity Prayer recently, *“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.”* We are all going to have storms in our lives, and we have to accept the storms that we cannot change. We sometimes would rather ignore the storm, pretend they do not exist, run away from them or try to fight them. Until we accept them, we

cannot move forward. The storm will end, as storms always do. Thunder and lightning storms have a natural cleansing affect. The rain cleanses the air, washes away the dust that covers everything, gives water and renews the plants and animals. Sometimes lightning starts fires in the forest that clears away all the dead branches and brush and makes room for new growth. That is how forest areas are renewed. Frequently the storms in our lives have the same effect. They frequently shake things up and make room for new growth in our lives. The storms cause pain and suffering while we are going through them, but we need to have faith that God is with us; and this storm will end, as storms always do. How it all works out is a mystery while we are going through the storm; but just as the storms worked out in the past, they will again in the present.

What is crucial in accepting the things we cannot change and having the courage to change things that we can, that is serenity. The serenity comes from faith in God and staying close to God in prayer. This is a mystery. I cannot say I will have a solution in a week; but I can say I will stay with God in prayer every day, and he will guide me. Sometimes the biggest fears we experience are the fears we create internally. Remember the opposite of faith is fear. When we lack faith, we develop fears that lead to anxiety and depression. These can be fear of failure, fear of success, fear of abandonment, fear of rejection and many more. We can fear that if I accept the storm that I cannot change, it will never end. The storm will end. The first step in working through the storm is accepting it.

One of the things that I struggle with is finding the courage to change the things I can. I have some anxiety when I have to talk to someone about something that I believe they will not like. I do not like the conflict. I make up all kinds of scenarios about how they will react that causes anxiety. I fear talking to them because of my lack of faith. If I can find serenity in prayer, knowing that this is the right thing to do and talking to them with love, most of the time they at least understand and sometimes are in total agreement.

So know that we will all have storms in our lives. When you experience them, pray the serenity prayer *“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.”*

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim