

IN NOMINE IESU

Beloved of the Lord,

Behold the strange and wonderful God who does not demand the sacrifice of your children upon some fiery altar, but the God who gives His only-begotten Son upon the Cross all so that you would know... know and be comforted that because He is the Son of God, you are His beloved redeemed Child of Promise and of Grace! See Christ for you as the Son of God as He deals with the disciples in the boat in the wee hours of the night – slash – morning just before sunrise!

Our Gospel this morning ends with the disciples worshiping Jesus, confessing Him to be the very and true Son of God! But how did they come to this confession?

What brings the 12 and Jesus to this night upon the raging sea? Due to His grief over hearing of the beheading of His cousin, John the Baptist, Jesus and the 12 come, by boat, to a remote region where the Lord was to heal, and heal, to cast out demons, to bring to health thousands upon thousands of people. We had this amazing miracle of the feeding of the 20,000 + with a small snack!

This was already a long, long day. Then, after the 20,000 had eaten their fill and the 12 baskets full of leftovers was collected, now they are told to get in the boat and sail off into the night... ah, without Jesus! He would stay behind to dismiss the crowds and then go off to pray.

Some of these 12 were fishermen. Fishermen fish at night. They knew the waters and the night sky, so this was not unusual. What was unusual was all that came before. They had experienced contrary seas and winds before, and indeed, though moving painfully slowly, they were making headway against the wind and wave. The time is now somewhere between 3 am and 6 am and they are gassed, tired, and weary.

Oh, they had seen Jesus do things that could only be explained as pertaining to the One who, as the Lord told Job, laid the foundations and pillars for the earth, who put the stars in their orderly places and who told the seas what their limits are to be, or measured the whole of the creation! Jesus has to be God, right!?

They had witnessed Him that very day heal every sickness brought to Him in that remote place... and if that wasn't enough, taking that tiny snack of the five fish and two loaves (John relates how this was a boy's snack consisting of what today might be five rye-crisp crackers and two sardines.) and feeds this mighty multitude. Earlier in this young ministry of their Master they already witnessed:

- the healing of the Centurion's servant, healing him remotely, simply by a word!
- How Jairus' daughter was raised from the dead, just to name two.
- Soon they would sup with Lazarus, after he spent 4 days wrapped in the swaddles of his grave-clothes, sleeping behind the hermetically sealed rock that covered his tomb.

The only possible explanation when we have such miracles and this feeding of the great multitude: **Jesus is God! Jesus is the Son of God, the long-expected Messiah, the Redeemer of the world!**

Yet this tired crew, when seeing Jesus walking atop this whipped up sea as though it was a paved road, show great fear, as if seeing a ghost! [Here, remember how He caused the Red Sea to wall-up, on both sides none the less, and the muddy sea-bottom was a firm roadway that allowed the Children of Israel to walk through easily... even allowing the chariots of Pharaoh to

pursue... until at the touch of Moses' staff after the last of the Children of Israel had safely crossed by... the seas returned!]

Yes, seeing this figure in the early morning hours atop the troubled sea, their response was not: "Jesus, hey, nice to see you, glad you could make it!" These 12, who had earlier needed to awaken their sleeping Savior who was on the cushion in the stern of the boat, only to see that the terrible waves ceased, immediately, again, they are gripped by fear!

Wow! Aren't you glad we're so much better, so much more enlightened than the Apostles!!! Of course!... you're not! The disciples' fear and cry, "It is a ghost, an apparition!" is no different than what you or I would cry out given the same circumstances.

Behold, here on this Altar is the Meal of Eternity. Behold, the Cup of Salvation! Behold, the Bread of Life! Wow! Look at what you need to step around, what is graciously in your way as you approach the Table of the Lord: The Baptismal Font. Here is your death and your resurrection as God gives new birth, a birth not based on the beloved's ability to agree or understand what has just happened. It is a miraculous birth as water and Word are joined. These two Gifts are very tangible, touchable, real, actual. God meets you here,

Let's add to it with the very Word of God, heard first in the Divine Service as the Lord reminds you that His name and your name are linked – "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!" The Invocation is followed by something so beautiful, the gift where we as His children bring our worries, fears, failures, hatreds, angers, loneliness's, and here in Baptismal joy, He takes those sins and declares you clean, His own in the Holy Absolution! Wonderful stuff, right!

But wait, there's more! The Word in the Liturgy is expanded upon in our readings, from the Old Testament and the New! Here Jesus speaks to us in unambiguous words. These are words that do not change. Oh, they reveal our sin. Ah, and they reveal every sin's answer – the Love of the Father, delivered through the Son's perfect sacrifice, and personalized to you by the Holy Spirit, using these Means, these Means of Grace!

Armed with all that, we ought to be filled with so much strength that should Jesus have walked by us on the sea we would have said, "Hop in Jesus, mighty fine to see Ya! We knew you'd be coming, just not really expecting this... but then, that's just how You are!"

Ah yes, that is what we should say, that is what the disciples in the boat should have said! Their reaction, like yours, like mine, is that of fear! "It must be a spirit, an apparition!"

Behold how strong your Savior God truly is. He doesn't give up on the 12 and He doesn't give up on you! There is a strength to His love that is for this fallen world. Pause with me for just a moment and drink that in! **His love is so strong He does not let your sinful foolishness deter, dissuade, derail, or dismantle His loving heart toward you!**

Now, behold this truth about Peter and about you and me: He and I, He and you; have the same shoe size:

- Just small enough to fit firmly into our mouths and
- just big enough to cause us to trip, fall, and stumble.

Behold Peter's response to Jesus' kind words, "Take heart, it is I! Stop being afraid!" Peter challenges Him. "If it is You then command me to join you out there on the water!"

You have to love Jesus and His one-word sermon, “Come!” Jesus doesn’t give up on old Pete! He doesn’t give up on you, either! He bids you to “come,” yes to the Altar to be fed, to this His House, to be forgiven and to offer the praise of thanksgiving. But Jesus also commands you,

“Come! – come into the rough seas of this world! You are witnesses to my Love, to my Power over sin! Come into the rough waves of life, but know this... I am here, on the waves with you. Indeed, I am calling you here and I abide, I remain. Oh, and I feed hungry stomachs, heal all diseases, raise the dead, cast out demons... I do it all. I Am God! Oh, and know this, I love you... always and in all ways, and I always will!”

Seeing Peter leave the boat is thrilling! Watching him take a step toward Jesus is amazing! Then come the distractions of this life, this high wind which Matthew says, he “saw!” We normally “hear” wind, we “feel” it. Ah, but to actually “see” the wind means that it was frightful! Peter sees the wind and fear immediately grips him and he begins to sink into this troubled sea.

Oh, how many times have you started to sink into the sea in fear? Have you ever noticed that when things are tough, when times are rough, folks so often invoke the name of the Lord! The old adage hold, “There are no atheists in foxholes!” If that is true for the unbelieving world, how much more for each one of us who come to His house with great regularity and eat the Bread of Life and drink from the Cup of Salvation?

The fallen human heart needs this Jesus, who in His perfect Righteousness takes on your flesh, all so that in His perfect sacrifice upon the awful tree at Golgotha, you would wear the robe of His righteousness. Yes, dear prodigal son, He sees you coming from afar off. He runs to you. He hears your confession, that you are no longer worthy to be called His son. Then, only as God can do, He brings out the shoes of a son, for one who had been enslaved in the sin of selfishness. He clothes your nakedness with the family robe of His righteousness. He places on the dirty, calloused hand that fed swine, on the correct finger, the ring of family. Oh, and as you are about to feast upon at this Altar, He has prepared the fatted calf, that you might make merry... as a son! After all, His great love has reassured you that you are still in the family!

Yes, you need this Jesus, this Father, this Holy Spirit. You fear as you see the wind in your life... and Jesus, who abides, whose promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the ages!” has your name attached to it in Baptismal certainty!

As Jesus took the hand of Peter, so He has and continues to take your hand. He brings you into the boat of the Church. Here you confess your “little faith!” Here, Jesus accepts that confession of sin, knowing that He has caused you to see your sin, and in that to see the only hope, the only answer to that horrid sin – His blood and righteousness.

Jesus brings you back into the boat, with Holy Absolution! – Doesn’t it just thrill you, comfort you, yes, keep you, when Pastor Smith declares, “In the stead, and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Pastor Smith rejoices, along with every other pastor and all of heaven as you receive this incredible gift of Divine Forgiveness as you say, “Amen!”

The 12 in that boat that early morning, in the now calm waters of the Galilee now cry out, in worship, “Truly, You are the Son of God!” This is a true and powerful confession by the 12,

even as it is when you realize and say the same thing. But what makes it so true, so powerful, and so amazing is that this confession comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Your Savior God gives you the strength to confess Him. He knows the sight of wind will again distract you. He also knows the power of His redeeming mercy and grace. Thus, He gives you a hunger and a thirst for His righteousness.

Oh, and one final thing. Having once again heard, received, and again, rejoicing in His grace, you are fed, and yes, you are led, back out of the boat into the wind-swept waves of the world to witness to dead souls and to troubled hearts that Jesus truly loves them, even as He loves you.

Seeing Jesus as the Son of God is the point of all this. **Seeing that this means He is the God of continual forgiveness**, the God who calms storms through His peace-full Word, this is the Jesus as Son of God that we are given to see –

- in Word,
- in Sacrament,
- in the fellowship of the redeemed!

Oh, you don't deserve it by your own reason or strength, but oh, how fully you are loved, cherished, forgiven, and redeemed... all because of Jesus, the Son of God who gave you everything He is and everything He has.

Even so, let us confess with the 12, "Truly, You are the Son of God!" here in the boat, and there upon the raging sea of the world! Amen, and SOLI DEO GLORIA!