

Pride Mass Homily, June 23, 2024

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Thanks so much Fr. Jim for thinking of me to preach at this Mass celebrating the gift of Pride, and a huge THANK YOU to you and your community for holding spaces for the LGBTQ+ Catholics in this Parish and area. I feel honored and humbled to be here before you.

For the past couple of Sundays Jesus has been presenting in provocative ways the reality of the kingdom of God in our midst. In the gospel according to Mark, Jesus points out that “the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath” which is remarkably liberating for his listeners who are burdened by the strict impositions of the law by the Pharisees and scholars of the law. He also makes it clear that the new humanity is based in listening, friendship, diversity, kindness and compassion beyond blood ties and strict gender roles: “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Today, after a set of parables about the presence and operation of the kingdom of God, Mark recounts the calm storm, which is a parable in action. It's a passage full of symbolism that presents Jesus as the victor over the power of evil as well as reveals the lack of faith that prevents the disciples from understanding the power of the kingdom of God, as expressed in the parables.

We know that in the biblical imagery, the sea is seen as a source of danger due to the traumatic experience of the Philistines arriving/invading from the sea centuries before; the belief that huge sea monsters such as Leviathan lived underwater; or the stories of shipwrecks told, etc. (Ps 104,25 26; Jon 1,4). But the Bible also makes sailing events a reference for salvific experiences (Wis 14:3-4; Jon 2).

I would like to present at least three points of reflection:

First, we observe that Jesus, "in the evening," decides to depart to another place. However, a deeper reading of the text reminds us that sunset is the moment in which night falls,

when shapes blur, when faith can falter, when trust wavers. In those moments, Jesus decides to make a boat trip and go "to the other shore", to the territory of the Decapolis, that is, heading towards non-Jewish lands, where the forces of evil could hinder the spread of the Gospel. Interestingly, faced with this initiative, the disciples do not raise any objection. They accompany and serve the Master in a perfect example of their identity as missionary disciples (Mk 3:14).

Discipleship is about moving out of our comfort zones personally, communally, socially, politically, nationally and worldwide and "go to the other shore." Pastoral ministries have been establishing throughout the history of the Church following Jesus' example of attending people's needs and sufferings. In and through our gay/queer siblings and children, the Lord has been and is inviting us "to go to the other shore." It's there where those pushed to the margins by the society and, unfortunately, the Church are that the Lord is inviting us to go. Pride celebration as Catholics it's not only about what we have done or not done, but to keep our ears, eyes and heart open for them, and see what sort of moves we must do for their

growth, wellness and safety. They are us and more than telling and sharing their stories, I think is better to see how we are journeying with them at their own pace, mindset, joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties.

One of those comfort zones to move away is from “our routine worship and work into a genuine encounter with Jesus and our better selves so that our lives will be changed for the good of all” (Archdiocese of Baltimore racial healing resource). Some diocesan policies and rules published recently on gender identity and the reception of the sacraments are hurting and discouraging families with LGBTQ+ folks from feeling part of the Church that they truly belong by Baptism.

Second, we also heard: the disciples took Jesus in the boat "just as he was." The Son of God had just come off a full day of teaching crowds of people on the shore. It seems safe to assume that Jesus gave his whole self to those teaching sessions-and so was probably quite tired by the time evening rolled around. In the same day, the Son of God can be both energized and exhausted. He is fully human, after all. We can imagine and

relate to-Jesus moving more slowly as the day drew on. Maybe his eyelids got heavy. Maybe he let out more than a few yawns. The gospel writer includes for a reason the detail that the disciples took Jesus with them on the boat "just as he was." This simple gesture talks a lot about our ministry to the LGBTQ+ siblings: to keep taking them with us "just as they are," particularly the LGBTQ+ little ones, please don't dismiss them, but accept, welcome and validate; there's nothing to be fixed, but nurtured; and there's no reason to look for blame. We don't need to change them at all. God is not expecting us and them to put on a show for Him. As an Omaha resident pointed out recently: "As Catholics we are called to protect the vulnerable and marginalized, to make sure they are safe and cared for, and we had serious concerns about the adverse outcomes of this policy."

Mark the evangelist continues the story saying that, suddenly, "a violent squall came up." The violence of the wind and waves causes the boat to be at the point of sinking. The desperation of the disciples, who fear for their lives, contrasts with the serenity of Jesus. His peaceful sleep comes from the absolute

trust he has in God. However, the disciples, amid danger, only perceive their own helplessness and terrified, cry out: "Do you not care that we are perishing?" Then Jesus wakes up and gets up. It is a reference to the newness of life of the resurrection. Sleep—a frequent metaphor for death—is contrasted with the “awakening and rising” of Christ who defeats the powers of evil and death. Therefore, his intervention restored calm to the agitated lake.

How many Catholics young and adults like those there outside get desperate when Parish communities like this one, dioceses, or even Pope Francis stand by the queer community. It’s again the fear and anguish that we would be perishing. But we believe that God in Jesus is the first one crossing to the other shores regardless the strong storms breaking over the Church due to the outreach ministries to the LGBTQ Catholics. Jesus is not only afraid of those storms, but he also calms them down at his command. Our trust in his word and compassionate love is our strength to calm them down as well.

Jesus, who demanded two orders to the storm, now poses two questions to his followers about fear and faith: Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith? They have allowed themselves to be so overwhelmed by the storm that they have forgotten the quiet presence of Jesus in their midst and that with him in the boat all dangers are overcome.

This is the faith that must reign in the heart of the disciple. However, they haven't reached a complete peace yet. Experiencing Jesus, victorious over scary episodes, they become overwhelmed realizing that they're following someone great. Their question: "Who is this?" it's already a first confession of faith of those who allow themselves to open themselves to a deeper search. But it is a question that has no explicit answer now, at this moment. It is up to each one of us to answer it, through life.

The story of the calm storm shows us who Jesus is and that clinging to him is a characteristic of the disciple. It also shows us that, even if we are on board with him, there will be times

we will navigate through rough seas, and the power of the waves will break over us making us feel terrified, and that's OK.

Probably listening to and reflecting on this passage could have highlighted the difficulty of remaining firm in faith when storms loom over our lives and outreach ministries. But they could also have made it clear that Jesus is always journeying with us, and that trust can be rekindled with prayer.

Therefore, we now turn to the Lord:

- Thank you, Lord, for your Word that gives us the certainty that you come with us also in times of difficulty.
- We ask you for our community, for our Church. Do not allow fear, violence, comfort or lack of faith to prevent us from going to the diverse "Decapolis" of our world. Make us, Lord, a Church always on the way out.
- We present to you so many people, particularly our LGBTQ+ siblings, shaken by the storms and waves of life. We present you those who are homeless, jobless, kicked out from their families of origin; to those who feel defeated by illness,



depression, loneliness; to whom fear leaves no room for hope. Show them your presence, as you did with the disciples in the sea of Galilee.

Grant us, Lord, the courage to go to "other shores", to bear witness to the Gospel in places that are not easy or comfortable for us. Amen!