

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

My dear beloved flock, the text for our meditation is the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew the Fourteenth chapter, verses twenty two through thirty six.

Boys and girls, I pray that you are doing well today. Have you ever been afraid? Afraid of a loud noise at night or a thunderstorm. Afraid when mom or dad leaves that they might not come back? In our text for today, we see the disciples are afraid. We see that Peter is afraid. What does Jesus do to calm their fears, as well as our own? Ponder that question as you hear the the rest of the sermon. You may go back to your seats and those who love you.

Our Gospel this morning picks up right where our Gospel for last week left off. Immediately after the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus sends his disciples on while he takes care of sending the crowd home. After the crowd was gone, he finally got the alone time to pray that he had originally been looking for. He's able to pour out his heart to his heavenly Father in prayer for what seems to be a rather lengthy period of time, as the next time we see Jesus and the disciples together again it is the **fourth watch of the** night, that is, just before dawn. In the meantime, the disciples are following Jesus's directions to **go on ahead of him to the other side**. But on the Sea of Galilee a storm had come up. We're not told that this is quite as terrifying a storm as it was when Jesus calmed the storm earlier in his ministry, but still it was enough to really rock the boat and impede their progress.

While the disciples are fighting the wind and the waves, though, they see something out on the water. Not something, but someone. Their initial reaction is that they're seeing a **ghost**, for what else could stand on top of stormy waters but a spirit? If they weren't scared by the storm, this sight rocks their core. They are scared out of their minds. Jesus brings words of encouragement. "**Take courage,**" he says. And here, perhaps, our translation does us a disservice. How does Jesus bring them comfort

while he looks like a ghost standing on the water? He doesn't simply say, "**It is I.**" In Greek he uses the odd expression, "*Ego eimi,*" that is simply, "**I am.**"

As the disciples are being knocked around by the storm, as they're shaking with fear at this *thing* they see out on the water, Jesus brings comfort by focusing their faith on Who He is. It's Jesus, but it shouldn't surprise them to see Jesus out on the water, because he is God. Jesus in the midst of that storm takes them back to Old Testament, to the Moses and the Burning Bush. There God promised Moses that he was the one that always had been with them, was with them now, and would be with them in the future. Because he's not the God of the past tense, as if he did his work and now it's over, nor is he the God of the future tense so that he'll get to his work when he's good and ready. He's the God of the present tense, always there to help, protect, support, and forgive his people. Jesus shows himself to be that ever-caring and protecting God by doing something no person could ever do—walking on the stormy sea. God is the only One who trod upon the waves.

God continues to be the **I AM** for us as well. We may well feel like our lives are a stormy sea, and we're being buffeted by the waves as the disciples boat was. We may well be in great danger or trouble, filled with sadness and apprehension. But Jesus comes to us in the middle of all that torment and says, "**Take courage; don't be afraid, I AM.**" And no matter what disaster has come our way, our faith can find courage and rest in the words of Jesus. No matter what disaster has beset us, he is able to help, with his power, through his Word, and his powerful reminders of his love and forgiveness that are ours.

But Jesus does not help with merely comforting words but with His very presence. Peter, always the adventurous disciple, took the opportunity and shows his trust in a remarkable way. He reasoned that if Jesus was able to walk on the water himself, surely Jesus could let him walk on the water too. "**Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water.**" Jesus invites him to come.

You can see in your mind's eye this picture of Peter crawling out of the boat and walking on water, firm as ground, toward Jesus. He walked right up to him, focused on Jesus, all is well. He trusts Jesus to make this happen; his faith is focused on Jesus and on him only. After all, here is Peter's God and Savior! Here is the one who can do anything! What does Peter have to be afraid of when Jesus is with him?

But then we're told that Peter **saw the wind**. He took his eyes off his Savior, let his faith lose focus, and he looked around him. And what a ridiculous scene he saw! He was standing on the water in the middle of the Sea of Galilee in the middle of a storm! What was he doing? Why was he there? He was going to get hurt, or worse, die! These waves were too much; the wind was too strong! What was going to happen to him?! He began to sink, began to drown.

Notice what Jesus did. He didn't let Peter drown and say, "Oops, you really should have trusted me. Sorry." Nor did he even let him "suffer" a little bit in that water before ultimately rescuing him. No, Matthew who as one of the disciples was an eyewitness to all of this, says that Jesus **immediately reached out his hand and caught him**. There is a slight reprimand on Jesus part, "**Why did you doubt?**" but its tone is one not of scolding but encouragement: "Why doubt? Remember I can always take care of you."

After returning back into the boat, the disciples worship Jesus saying "Truly, you are the Son of God." This Son of God, reaches out His hand to save others but He cannot save Himself. The perfectly obedient Son, the One who has done no wrong, goes to the cross, stretching out his hands to meet the nail, spear, and thorns. To meet the fear and mockery on your behalf. Facing the full wrath of God, Jesus bears all of it in your place. Jesus rises from the dead as proof that your sins are forgiven by Him as your Lord and Savior. Jesus ascends to the right hand of the Father to daily intercede for you and help you.

At the right hand of the Father, Jesus continues to grab us by the hand during our fears and distractions. As his nail scarred hand pulls us up

and yanks us out of the water we're reminded that there is forgiveness. I've been forgiven for those times I've not trusted him, you've been forgiven for the times you've been more focused on your problems than his solutions. **“You of little faith,”** he says to each of us, **“Why do you doubt my love for you? Why do you doubt my ability to protect and help you? Why do you doubt my forgiveness?”** And we have no answer because there is no reason to doubt. Jesus is faithful in his love as the covenant-keeping God, **I AM**. Jesus is faithful in his ability to protect as the one who has all power to work all things for our good. Jesus is faithful in his forgiveness because he paid for our sins, even our fears, doubts, and, distractions, so they are no more than a distant memory.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.