

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

1 Kings 19:9, 11-13

Psalm 84

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

Over the last few years our movie theatres have been showing a steady stream of big-budget superhero films. I haven't seen too many of them myself, but it's almost as if there's something about the superhero genre that has tapped into a cultural need in recent years.

To be sure, part of appeal has no doubt been that superheroes can do all sorts of cool things. As long as they meet a certain condition, most superheroes have access to very special powers. As long as Superman avoids kryptonite he can fly and have super-strength; as long as Batman has his utility belt and his other gadgets, he can outmanoeuvre any adversary.

Well our gospel passage today is a bit like a superhero story – albeit with a twist. For a while, Peter is able to do something extraordinary that regular people can't do – that is, walk on water. But in this case, it's not that Peter has a special power, but that Jesus lets *his* power work *through* Peter. *Jesus lets his power work through Peter.*

Picture the scene – the disciples are all sitting in their boat, when all of a sudden here comes what looks like a ghost walking on the water! The disciples are terrified! But when Jesus assures them that it's him, it's Peter who responds.

I have to say, I'm very fond of Peter. He made some embarrassing mistakes at times, but you can tell that he *really* trusted Jesus. By the time of this episode, Peter has been around Jesus long enough to know that he is more than a regular person. He doesn't have it all figured out yet, but he just knows that he wants to be around Jesus and follow him throughout his life. So when Jesus tells the disciples in the boat not to be afraid, Peter immediately decides to take it to the next level.

Now, notice that Peter doesn't just presume that he can walk out on the water. He also doesn't ask Jesus to help him walk on the water. All he asks is for Jesus to tell him to come to him. This is *really* good! It's as though Peter has figured out that if Jesus calls us to himself, nothing else will be able to get in the way. *If Jesus calls us to himself, nothing else will be able to get in the way, unless we let it.*

Of course, the next thing that happens is Peter lets something else get in the way! Instead of keeping his eyes fixed on Jesus, Peter starts thinking about everything that could go wrong. "This lake is really deep; this wind is howling; and I'm walking on water for crying out loud!" And the next thing he knows, he's sinking. Remember, he didn't start to sink until he began worrying about all the things that could go wrong on his way to Jesus, but as soon as he did the game was up.

Once Jesus pulls Peter up to safety, he criticises Peter's little faith. Really, it more a case of *short-lived faith*. Peter had great faith to begin with—enough to step out onto the water!—it just didn't last very long. He didn't keep his eyes on Jesus.

There's a lovely artwork depicting this scene in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. It's a marvellous mosaic/painting known as the *Navicella*—a replica of an original work by Giotto—and it's positioned in the outer atrium in such a way that, as you leave the Basilica, it's the last thing you see before returning to the outside world... provided you look up.

It was placed there on purpose to remind people as they were leaving the basilica of this episode of Saint Peter walking on water in the middle of a storm. In other words, it was intended to be reminder, as people made their way from this heavenly basilica to the stormy seas of the world outside, to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus.

Peter was only able to walk on water while he kept his eyes fixed on Jesus, but the moment he focused on the waves and the storm he began to sink.

The lesson in this for each of us is clear. In the turbulence of our own lives, our first goal should always be to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. If, on the other hand, we turn from him and focus on all the waves crashing around us, it's a recipe for trouble.

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So for example, I know many of you are quite concerned about the way things seem to be heading in our culture at present, with declining mores and widening societal divisions being merely the most visible sign of a broader move away from our collective Judeo-Christian heritage.

Perhaps the most saddening thing is the harsh tone of much of what passes for debate at present—not so much rational dialogue as name-calling and emotional bullying—and such mutual incomprehension that opposing sides often struggle even to reach meaningful *disagreement*, yet alone anything approaching agreement. In the light of such concerning trends, I know it can be tempting to obsess about all the bad news and get rather depressed. But this is where the lesson of Saint Peter on the water is so instructive for us.

Whenever we are tempted to feel disheartened, disillusioned, or dispirited, it's important to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ, and he will help us weather any storm – whether in our lives, in the Church, or in the world. If we keep our eyes on Jesus, he will never let us sink.

There will be times when living a Christian life will seem to be too difficult, and you will be tempted to give up. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

There will be times when the world will tell you that you're crazy, and that our faith is all just a fairy-tale. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

There will be times when it seems like the very people who should be helping you—fellow members of the Church—can seem like your biggest obstacles. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

There will be times when you make terrible mistakes and have to ask for forgiveness. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

There will be times when people will do hurtful things to you, and *you* will need to forgive *them*. Keep your eyes on Jesus!

If you keep your eyes on the Lord, he will never let you go, and through you he will be able to do amazing things.

Because really, what we need more than anything else at present is not the right government, or the right legislation, or the right Church program, or the right bishop, or any other thing we might long for. These things aren't unimportant, but what we need more than anything else right now *is saints!* The Church right now—and our society right now—needs what it always needs – saints; lives of evident sanctity that by their very existence offer the most convincing demonstration of the Lord's grace and the value of our faith.

Imagine the impact that *one great saint* could have on our city, and indeed our country. Such a witness could transform our society far more than any program or piece of legislation.

So pray that we may have saints! Pray that you might become one! Cultivate the habit of always turning to the Lord in your need, and always drawing your hope from him, rather than from the passing circumstances of our world.

Through this morning's Eucharist, my prayer is that all of us may grow in our love and trust of the Lord, and that he will give us the strength to keep our eyes on him in everything, and to follow him with our entire lives. Amen.

