

Donnybrook

20 June 2021

Introduction

Youghal, in County Cork, was a great place to grow up. For a few years, our family had a boat, with a motor and a small cabin. In the summer time, we used it for fishing and for swimming and just for fun. In Youghal Bay, there is an island, called Capel Island and near that is a headland called Knockdoon. Once, it was my turn to steer the boat between the island and the headland. There was a rolling swell, with waves bigger than usual. It was tempting to turn around but that would have meant the boat would be sideways to the swell – the only thing to do was the face the waves, up and down, and keep going until we got past the two points. For me at, 15 or 16, it was scary and memorable. All these years later the nerve-wracking experience of going straight into the rolling swell is still with me. The experience came back to me when I read today's Gospel of the storm at sea.

Theme

There are three lessons, one for youngsters, one for adults and one for the community of faith.

Steps

Children first: Somethings things get too much and you don't know what to do. It could be anything – too much homework, a falling out with a friend, losing someone very close to you or a family crisis of some kind. The teaching of today's story is: even though we feel sometimes we are alone, actually we are not. Like the disciples, we can tell to the Lord how we are feeling and he will come to our help and stand alongside us.

Adults next: when something happens that really rattles us – again it could be anything: personal or family or career or loss of some kind – a good question to ask is what resources can I rely on in this situation. Please God there will be people I can turn to for support and there are structures of support as well. There is also my faith. David Adam, priest at Lindisfarne, once wrote a fine prayer which goes like this:

Calm, O Lord, as you calmed the storm;
Still me, O Lord, keep me from harm;
Let all the tumult within me cease,
Enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

The Lord is with us always and his desire is that we should not be afraid.

What about the community of faith? Mark presented the Stilling of the Storm to a community in great danger. The Jewish War was reaching a climax, a terrible war in which terrible things happened. James and John, Peter and Paul had all been put to death. Nero, the Roman emperor, had recently taken his life and a period

unprecedented upheaval followed, the year of the four emperors. There were divisions in the community to faith; some had abandoned the Gospel.

In many way, it is perfect Gospel for our times. And it is instructive. With the Building Hope project in the diocese as well as a National Synod on the way, it could be tempting to be satisfied with good managerial solutions for the various issues: catechesis today, parish councils, the collapse of the ordained ministry, the place of women, their voice and ministry. All these are important: but Mark teaches us to put in the centre our faith in Christ risen from the dead, over whom death no longer has any power. Discernment and the necessary decisions must flow from the very centre of our faith.

Conclusion

Mark calls us all to turn to the risen Jesus – as a community of faith, as grown-ups and even as children. In him, we place our trust – even when things are overwhelming and we feel that we are somehow lost. We can make our own famous Breton fisherman's prayer. In its shortest form ,it runs like this:

Lord!
The sea is so large
and our boat is so small. Amen.

As they say, I know the feeling.