

Blackrock, Cork

3 August 2021

Introduction

Welcome again, everybody. By the Sea of Galilee, there is a modern sculpture of today's Gospel – quite beautiful, with the background of the shimmering waters. The realism of the statue does raise a question: how do we approach such miracle stories today?

Topic

I would like to make three comments.

Steps

The first is this: in the Gospels you have healing miracles and what are called nature miracles. All the miracles point beyond themselves to something else. In general, the healing miracles – cures and exorcisms – point to the kingdom of God, as an illustration of the proclamation of Jesus. In general, the nature miracles – the calming of the storm, the walking on the water – point beyond themselves to the Risen Lord and his power over life and death.

Our Gospel story is a good illustration. The time of writing was a time of great upheaval. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem triggered a crisis for all Jews, including those who believed in Jesus. It is likely that Matthew's community had just broken away from the mother religion, a painful separation. Added to that, you had increased pressure from local officials of the Roman Empire, a kind of low grade persecution. So, all in all, "interesting" times, as they say.

How would they have heard today's story? The boat represents the community of faith, small, fragile. The turbulent waters represent life and death but also the times – unstable, unpredictable, threatening. The appearance of the Risen Lord is both an assurance and an appeal to faith. "It is I, do not be afraid."

Conclusion

Read in that way, this miracle story – apparently so outside our experience and our scientific understanding of nature – can speak to us today. The community of faith is small and fragile. The times are unstable and unpredictable. We need as never before the assurance of the Risen Lord. Perhaps the words addressed to Peter and the others are addressed to us: "Courage. It is I. Do not be afraid."