

Sermon for Sunday 20th February 2022 (Seragesima) 'Where is your faith?' from Fr. Mike.

Genesis 2.4b-9, 15-25; **Psalm 65**; Revelation 4; **Luke 8.22-25**.



Natural Storms and Spiritual Storms

The character of Jesus is shown through his calming of the storm. 'Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a great calm.' (v.24) Jesus is showing his divine control over nature.

A spiritual storm has some of the same characteristics. The most highly visible difference is that the *physical* storm passes relatively quickly, having a definable end. In contrast, a *spiritual* storm may have to be weathered for much longer. Neither variety will be over until God says that it is. During these times we must praise, pray, and persevere in faith, secure in the knowledge that God certainly knows what he is doing, even if we do not!

How do we apply this today?

The current pandemic is possibly a modern illustration of a spiritual storm that has aspects of the physical swirling around within it. We are, as a society, enduring a

seemingly endless variation of Coronavirus variants and their physical effects on our institutions and individuals. Emotional, mental and spiritual consequences are also swirling around, yet these stormy manifestations may not always seem obvious.

Whether we are 'launched forth' (either individuals or as a community) into physical or spiritual 'jeopardy', as the KJV expresses it, we are required to dig deep within our God-given reserves in order to endure, conquer and ultimately emerge as stronger, faithful, and righteous beings.

How we navigate this unpredictable pandemic continues to be a real test of faith.

Some have remained in the harbour throughout. Some have stayed away from any boat, as it were, in every sense. Others have carried on as if nothing has changed. Many have responded to each nuance presented by the Coronavirus 'storm' with optimism, while others have been super-cautious, or even now after our 22 months 'at sea' remain in a constant state of terror. There are as many reactions to the challenge we all face as there are people. Each response has its own story and validity.

So where can we find God, and how can we sustain any faith in a storm?

The sacrament might just present a subtle clue. Having no real understanding of *how* it works, we trust that when we are offered Christ's 'body' in the form of consecrated bread, then this spiritual reality of the Real Presence of God will, as Jesus promised, sustain us in good times and bad. Easy to say, but not always so easy to feel perhaps? This is where faith is able to nibble at our reservations and in time promote a modicum of 'calm' in troubled waters.

'Where is your faith?'

It all depends on the depth of faith received, and how you choose to see things...

We traditionally believe that once the communion host is consecrated, Christ becomes present as a spiritual and physical reality - embodied in fact, in the bread (body) which we break. Equally, the communion wine is transformed into the very blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, these elements are by their very nature, perfect, and as such can only be a positive and 'calm' experience for those who receive them. As the psalm appointed for this morning reminds us:

'Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple'(v.4).

That said, at this stage of pandemic, we are still advised to receive Holy Communion 'in one kind' (bread only), the argument being that Christ will still be fully present.

This of course makes logical sense, yet some still feel a little uncomfortable that we are not responding fully to the command 'do this' by excluding the common cup. For some Christians it is not enough that their priest has received the blood of Christ as their ordained servant. For some this only triggers feelings of spiritual incompleteness, or is even seen as a pitiful betrayal of our Lord's command at the very time we are challenged to faithfully hold our nerve.

There is also a logic in the belief that any chance of medical danger from sharing the chalice is both a physical and spiritual impossibility, given that it contains the blood of Christ – the thinking being that Christ (perfection personified) cannot and indeed would not transmit disease.

So, what then is the problem? Where is our faith in this instance?

We are in a state of global sickness, some of which is physical and some of which is spiritual. The forces of darkness are therefore pleased by the disruption and heartache suffered by humanity at this stage of our history. We need to find a way to regain our equilibrium, a way to 'still the storm'. How can we navigate safely?

Something for your prayers, going forward...

We are certainly all in the same boat in terms of potential danger of infection from Coronavirus in the world at large. Perhaps in these times of spiritual malaise we may have reached the point where a swift injection of theological compromise is also required to promote the necessary (and desired) spiritual healing.

In pre-Covid times, our natural response to Holy Communion during sickness was to 'intinct' – that is to deliberately place a small droplet from the blood of Christ onto the host (bread) so that the faithful 'sick' could also effectively receive their Holy Communion in both kinds. This would naturally require some careful preparation by the priest, yet it is neither a radical nor impossible evolution. I wonder, has our particular community of faith become tossed, by the storms of circumstance, into this particular spiritual (and indeed pastoral) space now? Would Holy Communion by intinction then, be an appropriate antidote to the stormy seas facing us as a community struggling to worship faithfully at this stage of the pandemic?

'By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.' (Ps. 65.5)

Once you have prayed about this, please let me know what is revealed to you in faith.

Fr. Mike (Seragesima 2022)