

Homily for Mass for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception

June 21, 2015

**† Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: Anyone who has ever traveled by sea by ship knows that one day it can be calm and flat while the next day it can be whipped up to furious frenzy of wild waves. Down through the ages people have fought the sea, befriended it, feared it, even loved it. Island nations appreciate the security it offers them, but it still needs to be kept in check as it gnaws away at cliffs and beaches.

We have learned to understand its ways through long experience and tried to contain its storms and tantrums. But we are human. We forget, and we allow our hopes of material gain or economy to undermine the wisdom of the past. In recent years we have been reminded of the destructive power of the sea, for example the tsunami in Eastern Asia and the hurricanes on the Atlantic and Gulf coasts of the United States.

There is not much love for the sea in the Old Testament. Its unruly nature is uppermost in the awareness of the writers. At the very beginning of Genesis the sea is identified with the formless void of the deep, and it is only through the action of the creator God that the heavens and earth are

formed and the deep is held in check. The same theme is taken up by the book of Job. In the passage we heard in today's first reading, when the Lord wishes to answer Job's questions about his suffering, He begins by contrasting Job's human limitations with God's own almighty powers. The Lord's first illustration tells how He has put limits on the sea and controlled it. The message is quite clearly that only God can control the sea, as had been shown in the parting of the Red Sea as the Israelites made their way to the Promised Land.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus controls the sea. The language of the story reflects that of the book of Job. The sea is told to be quiet and calm, and its accomplice the wind is rebuked and drops its force in obedience to the command. But Jesus' companions in the boat saw Him initially as any other human being. How can it be that He has such powers? Once again the question on the lips of both the disciples and others is: "Who can this be?" What sort of man is this who by his own power does what only God can do? This is the key question that runs through this part of Mark's Gospel. What are we to make of such Jesus?

Clearly, the boat was a sign of the Church for those who heard Mark's Gospel—just as even today a boat is often used to symbolize the Church. For the early Church, persecutions by the Roman and Jewish

authorities often appeared ready to swamp and sink the little boat of the early Christian community. Today, we can think of many things that seem ready to sink the Church—from persecutions in some parts of the world to scandals that we hear about in the news. Our personal ships of faith seem ready to sink from time to time as well—when we wonder at the fearsome troubles we face in our lives, in our families, in our work and in our world. Sometimes, too, we have to wonder if our sins are drilling holes in the hull of our ship of faith. We may think that we are alone and adrift in a storm.

Job wondered why so many terrible things had happened in his life despite being innocent and faithful to God—only to hear the answer that God is always present and powerful in ways far beyond our understanding.

The disciples in the storm-tossed boat thought that Jesus was asleep and paying no attention to their plight, but the point was precisely that Jesus their Messiah was there with them in the boat even if they did not fully understand His saving presence.

In our own time, the depraved shooting of nine victims at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina, makes no sense. But already in the aftermath of this despicable crime we have seen the power of forgiveness

and the triumph of love over hate. Indeed, Jesus is with us at every moment and in every frightening and threatening situation.

Also this past week we have seen a lot of praise as well as criticism for the new encyclical on ecology by Pope Francis by entitled, *Laudato Si', On the Care of Our Common Home*. Pope Francis is calling on the world to accompany this event with renewed attention to environmental degradation and to remember that “the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (§159). The Holy Father said of his encyclical, “Let us pray that everyone can receive its message and grow in responsibility toward the common home that God has entrusted to us.”

At the same time, in reading a papal encyclical, it is important to distinguish between “core Catholic moral teachings,” which Catholics are called to respect, and “prudential judgments,” which Catholics are asked to consider prayerfully, humbly, and with open hearts and minds. Care for God’s creation is a core Catholic moral teaching woven throughout the Bible and has been emphasized by recent popes (see Introduction, §§ 3-6) and the U.S. bishops. A prudential judgment is “intelligence applied to our actions” (U.S. bishops, 2001) on particular issues in light of those core moral teachings. Even for those who disagree on prudential judgments,

such as the cause of climate change, the moral case for acting to protect the created world remains.

In this regard, Pope Francis himself says, “On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion; she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views” (§61). Thus, Pope Francis frames his encyclical on ecology as an urgent appeal for dialogue, saying, “I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all” (§14).

In a key paragraph that you may not see emphasized too much in the popular media, Pope Francis also reminds us that, “Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. . . . Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion” (§§119-120). We have then to ask ourselves, what does cultivating and preserving the earth mean and are we truly caring for creation, including the most vulnerable members of God’s creation?

Finally, today, on this Father's Day, I welcome those fathers and sons who have just returned from the Father and Son Holiness Pilgrimage over this past weekend. It is so important that fathers provide this great example of faith for their sons to follow as together they seek to grow in virtue and holiness.

Whatever our state in life, in the midst of our sense of being overwhelmed by the depths of life's problems, Christ offers us a way forward. We put our trust in Him. Jesus offers His disciples the inner peace that the world cannot give, and here we are asked to let go of our fears and accept that same gift. It does not mean that we will not experience life's storms and challenges. It does mean that we will be able to ride such encounters like a good sailor, accumulating the wisdom that centers us on what matters, what is true. Even when Jesus seems asleep in the boat, our trust in Him can bring about the easing of the wind and the calming of the sea. Gathering here at the table of the Lord in the community of faith, we are reminded that we are never truly alone, for indeed "God is with us."

May God give us this grace. Amen.