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# Let's cross to the other side

Pat Marrin | Jun. 22, 2009 NCR Today

"Let's cross to the other side." Mark 4:36

This reading from Mark 4 is rich in imagery that no doubt informed most of the homilies churchgoers heard yesterday. The boat carrying Jesus and his disciples in a night crossing of the Sea of Galilee is caught in a squall and is taking on water. The disciples are afraid for their lives and cry out, but Jesus is asleep in the stern of the boat.

The story is applicable to many situations as an appeal for faith in the face of crisis. Here is another interpretation I like as well: The frequent crossings back and froth on the sea are de facto training exercises for the disciples to teach them how to live in the precarious zone between ordinary life and resurrected life. The characteristics of these sea experiences reveal a dimension of discipleship with Jesus that is more than meets the eye.

The early church lived with the memory of Jesus. He was absent for them as he is for us. The gospels were written to somehow convey the mystery of both Jesus' absence by death (he is asleep) and his continued presence as risen (he is awake). The church is called to live continually the passage called the Paschal Mystery. The church is in the world and yet not of the world. In this Marcan metaphor, the church's institutional status is that of a boat on the sea, not a secure building on dry land. The kingdom of God is here and now, yet not yet. Jesus is visible only to believers and the church lives by a logic and a self-sacrificing love that often makes no sense to the world. The church passes through storms that would sink it except for its faith in Jesus. The sign of membership is baptism -- going into the water, dying to self in order to live in Christ. Baptismal maturity enables us to live the risen life now. Those who lead the church must learn to walk on water, as Peter is challenged to do.

This is our challenge as well. How many crossings have you made? How many times have you experienced a crisis that threatened to sink you, in which you felt like you were dying, then came back with renewed faith? The Christian life is about living in this precarious state, even taking risks to test out the "impossibility" of discipleship -- following Jesus wherever he goes, into suffering, into situations that require "miracles" to resolve.

The individual Christian, the parish, the church itself that prefers security and predictability to this adventure misses these training exercises at sea, where open water, swells and troughs, the falling and rising of the sea, the long dark night, are what teach us how to trust God, to pray as though our very lives depended on it.
If you feel trapped, lifeless and bored to death, it may just be your time to go to sea.

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