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Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Thomas Gumbleton | Jun. 28, 2006 The Peace Pulpit

The Gospel passage ends with a very important question: Who can this be that the wind and the sea obey him? It was a question that Mark, the Gospel writer, wanted the community of his day to reflect on and, of course, it?s a question for all of us to reflect on also. Often we think of the miracle stories in the Gospel as simply that, miracle stories, stories of wondrous things that Jesus could do. And sometimes we use them to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. In fact, what these miracle accounts are, and this one certainly is, are a way of teaching. Mark is trying to teach his community, and to teach us, that we must reflect deeply on who Jesus really is. The wind and the sea obey him.

Right away, the hearers of Mark?s time would be very mindful of what they knew from their Hebrew Scriptures -- that passage from Job that we heard today. ?Who shut the sea behind closed doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garments and thick darkness its swaddling clothes, when I set its limits with doors and bars in place?? Who alone has dominion or control over the elements, the world, the wind, the sea? Job, of course, is reflecting what you read in the very beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures in the book of Genesis: In the beginning when God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth had no form, it was void; it was chaos, formless; but the Spirit of God hovered over the water. God said, ?Let there be a firm ceiling between the waters and let it separate waters from waters.? So God made the ceiling and separated the waters below it from the waters above it. God was the one who had control over the waters of the earth, the sea, the ocean, the wind, the elements. God and God alone.

And so for the question, Who could this be?, Mark is urging his readers to remember and to act upon the truth -- this is God! This is God in their midst. Perhaps it was especially difficult for them because some of those to whom Mark was writing had known Jesus as a human, one like them in every way. They?d seen him weep, they?d seen him laugh, they?d seen him get tired, they?d seen him become angry. He was fully human. But now they have to understand he is God, and this is what we need to understand also and not just take it for granted. Jesus is the son of God. We really have to let that enter deeply into our awareness, that Jesus who is our

brother, who is like us in every way except sin, this Jesus is the Son of God.

And as we reflect upon that, we also then experience with the disciples how Jesus is always in our midst, the Son of God. Even though Jesus was sleeping in the boat, he was with them, and they had no cause for fear, no cause for concern, no cause to be upset. He was with them.

And the same thing is true for us. When Mark wrote, he wrote at a time when the church was in great travail. The persecutions of Nero had started, and it was also a time when there were divisions within the church. Paul writing to the church at Corinth had to rebuke them, because some were following one person, others following another person. They had factions. They were divided. Paul himself experienced, when he went from place to place, hostilities from those who did not want to hear the word he was preaching. I?m sure that the early Christians must have wondered at times: Where is God? What?s happening to our church?

And isn?t it true for us that some of the same things are happening? We find ourselves in a church were there are divisions. Sometimes it?s very distressing. Some who feel that we?re not being progressive enough, others who feel we?ve moved too far, too fast and so there?s reaction setting in and sometimes we get discouraged about this and we wonder, ?Well, where is God, where is Jesus?? But today?s Gospel assures us that Jesus is in our midst. And just as Jesus could stand up and calm the seas and calm the winds, bring peace, that same Jesus is with us and can do the same thing.

But when we listen to what St. Paul tell us today we become aware again that it?s going to be Jesus doing miraculous things, coming back in a powerful way and being visibly present among us. St. Paul reminds us, ?Whoever is in Christ is a new creation. For that one, the old things have passed away, a new world has come. All of this is the work of God who in Christ reconciles us to God.? And God has entrusted to us this ministry of reconciliation.

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In a few moments, we?re going to baptize Scarlet Ann, a tiny little baby who is going to become this new creation. The commitment, as she grows up, is to be a minister of reconciliation, to take on this new creation who is Jesus, to become one in Jesus. But all of us are already baptized. We?ve already been called to become a new creation, to become the ones who reach out as Jesus did, to reconcile, to bring back, to calm the storms and the seas, the wind. Certainly those first disciples took

great comfort when Jesus stood up and calmed everything. We are the ones now who are to come forward, to try to bring calmness and peace into our world, to be ministers of reconciliation. It?s in the church that we need to do this.

Just yesterday I was invited to carry out a responsibility to talk at a meeting of gay and lesbian people. This is a big division in our church. These are people who feel very much rejected by the community of disciples. And we are that community. It?s very difficult for them to come into a Catholic church, a Christian church, without checking ahead of time. Will it be a friendly community or will they be hostile to us? How evil that is, that anyone should feel rejected when he or she comes into a community of disciples of Jesus. We haven?t heard the Word. We haven?t recognized who Jesus really is. We haven?t accepted our call to be reconcilers, to be those who bring peace and calmness as Jesus did. Well that kind of situation exists in our church.

The other experience that I?ve had very recently and that I?ve spoken about before is my becoming involved with survivors of sexual abuse in the church. To me this is one of the worst situations of alienation that I can think of. An innocent child is abused by someone who represents God for that child, and then later the victim is treated like the enemy. I?ve had hundreds of people contact me and tell me their stories, of how they have tried to be reconnected with the church, to rebuild their faith, their confidence in the church, and even more, their faith and confidence in God. But they?ve been pushed away. Instead of the church reaching out to draw them in, they?ve been pushed away in the legal process that makes them enemies. That?s a situation which probably most of us would not have much occasion to reach out to an individual person who is a survivor. Perhaps some of us do. But certainly what all of us could do is to pray that within our church, and especially the leadership of our church, there?ll be a change of heart.

I just recently spoke to the committee of bishops that oversees what we call ?protecting our children.? And I was trying to get across this point. We have to reach out to these survivors. So one of the bishops said to me, ?Well, we live in this country where the system of law is adversarial. We have to accept that.? What a failure, it seems to me, that describes. That we accept, because we live in a country where the system of law is adversarial, that these victims become our enemies, adversaries. So we must pray that there?ll be a change in our church so that there will be a reaching out, a reconciling. That we can bring calmness and peace and love where there?s been so much hurt and pain and suffering and terrible alienation.

Each one of us is called to become that new creation, to grow into the

fullness of who we are as disciples of Jesus, who live with Jesus within us. Each of us is called to carry on his work. Jesus is in our midst. That?s what we hear so powerfully in the Gospel -- that Jesus is in our midst, most of all because Jesus lives within each one of us. This morning as we witness this baptism and this little baby is made a new creation, my hope is that each of us will renew our own commitment to grow as a disciple of Jesus, to grow more fully into him, to carry on his work. We must stand up as Jesus did in the boat and be those who reach out to calm the storm, to end the factions, to bring reconciliation, to bring peace. As we do that, what Jesus did long ago in that boat in the Sea of Galilee will begin to happen within our community more and more. The winds will be calm and peace will happen, reconciliation will come about, our church will grow in love.

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