

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time C

I don't think I will ever forget Charles. Charles had the rack below mine in Navy Boot Camp. He was also a member of the rock squad. That's what we called the guys in the Navy couldn't swim. Now, no one knew that Charles couldn't swim. We found out shortly after 60 of us jumped, fully clothed, into a very large swimming pool that featured no shallow end for wading in. After Charles and the six or so other members of this less-than-elite group had been pulled out of the water, I remember thinking:

- Who joins the Navy when they can't swim?
- Were they foolish or brave for not telling anyone they couldn't swim?

I don't know what basic training is like now, but when I went through it became pretty clear to me within the first few hours that absolutely no one with any kind of authority was the least bit interested in any objection or opinion any of us recruits might have had about what was going on.

These guys were neither foolish nor brave, we were all just recruits that had learned from our training experience... three things:

- 1. Drowning was probably **better** than angering our company commander who had a particular talent for making young sailors wish they were dead anyway.

The other two lessons were more valuable:

- 2. You can trust your shipmates

And....

- 3. No one was going to just let us drown.

(Pause)

Today, we hear Jesus tell Peter, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch."

This idea, this notion of entering into deep water, whether we can swim or

not is something that touches us as Christians. Deep water is a challenge, a risk. It is a dive into the unknown and it can be very frightful.

But it can also be a place of great reward.....and of opportunity.

Later that night, I asked Charles why he went into the Navy when he couldn't swim. He told me he was the first person in his family to ever finish high school. He could have stayed and worked the coal mines and been fine enough, but the military gave him a chance to see enough money to actually help his family. The Navy gave him choices for training, and he was going to be a cook. He was also going to see as much of the world as he could. It actually never dawned on him until that morning that he might be expected to actually swim.

By the way, the Navy taught him how to tread water, which is all that is really required, since no one can swim the width of an ocean.

I learned a lot that day from Charles.

Since then, I've also learned that all of us face deep waters of many kinds. No one gets a "no-swimming" pass, everybody eventually gets into the pool. And whether we swim or tread water or hold on to a life-saver, deep waters are never really easy.

Sometimes the decision to jump in requires a lot of prayer and reflection. For example, each week we pray for those who are considering their vocation in life. Of course we are praying for those who are considering entering the ordained or religious life, but we also pray for those whose vocation is as a single person or as a married person. These are not vocations to be taken lightly. Our vocation is meant to be a place of joy. Sure it will always have its rough times, but over all, a well-discerned vocation, once followed, is one worth living, because it is of God.

So, by this example, we might dive into the deep waters.... after weighing the options and making what we hope to be the best choice.

Other times we are pushed in.

Divorce, single parenthood, addictions, illness, loss of a loved one, loss of income can overwhelm us and we are left wondering how this all happened and whether there is any good that can come from it.

When left to **ourselves**, with our own limited strength and will, the very best we can often do... is tread water.

However, the toughest and ultimately the most beautiful lesson we can learn from any of these things is that we are not meant to go at it alone. It's OK to let go of our fears and our pride because, ...there is *something* and *someone*, bigger than all of this "stuff" that seems to drown us and drag us down for the third time.

(PAUSE)

It is no mistake that Jesus, the author of Life and the Victor over death speaks from Peter's boat.

The boat itself is a symbol for the Church. Another name for the Church is the Bark of Peter. Bark is an old-fashioned word that means a type of boat.

Since the boat holds Peter, it symbolically holds all of Christ's disciples. We are all doing God's work, in Peter's boat. Some are deckhands, others are navigators, some are cooks and stewards. And sometimes, when we really need to be, we are passengers.

Saint Anselm said that the Bark of the Church may be swept by the waves, but it can never sink, because Christ is here.

(PAUSE)

"Do Not Be Afraid"! The voice of Christ speaks to each of us and all of us at the same time. He speaks to His Church, past present and future.

- If God is calling you, like He called Isaiah to step out of your comfort zone, "Do Not Be Afraid.... take courage.....raise your hand and pray, "Here I am!.... Send Me!" The adventure may be hard, but it will

- If He is calling you to stretch and grow like Peter, set aside your pride and....."Do Not Be Afraid"! Let your answer be, "I've tried it my way and have nothing to show for it, "at your command I will lower the nets"
- Perhaps you are being challenged to love someone whom you think is not lovable....."Do Not Be Afraid"! Remember Paul persecuted the Church, but after an encounter with Jesus, he became an Apostle and a great Saint.

There is still uncertainty when we enter those waters, but we can experience them in a new and better way, knowing that Christ has passed through the deep waters of life and the deepest waters of death, transforming them for us.

In the wake of those waters:

- He left us one another. Trust your shipmates...we will at least stay near while we tread water together.
- He left us the Sacraments, His Living Word in Scripture and Grace upon Grace in our Catholic Faith and Traditions. He will not let us drown. Even though we might die, we will live because we serve, as Paul reminds us today, "he who has died, was buried and was raised on the third day"

These waters, though a source of unknown peril, are also a source of adventure, of strength and, perhaps, eventually...of comfort.

If you think you might be hearing or feeling God calling, pray for the Spirit of Discernment and know that whatever it is, if it is of God, then there is no reason to fear even the deepest of waters. If it is of God, once you've passed through it, He will show you how full your nets have become. And should the good Lord ask you to leave everything in that net behind, and He might, remember Peter and know that you are in good company.

God stands taller than the deepest ocean, and whether we can see Him or feel Him....or not...we are in His hands.

Let us rejoice in the truth and joy that comes to us through this Gospel.