

The Twelfth Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	Job 38:1, 8-11
<i>Response</i>	It is good to give thanks to the Lord
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 107:23-24, 25-26, 28-29, 30-31
<i>Second Reading</i>	2 Corinthians 5:14-17
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	“A great prophet has arisen among us!” “God has visited his people!”
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 4:35-41

The twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time for year B takes us to a very powerful and unforgettable account of Jesus’ miracles in the Gospel of Mark 4. That’s the famous story of the stilling of the storm. It’s in Mark 4:35-41, so let’s look at the Gospel for today. It’s not very long, but there’s a lot in it. And then we’ll look at it in light of the Old Testament background and the Responsorial Psalm for this week, which is particularly well attuned to this Gospel. So it says this in verse 35:

On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go across to the other side.” And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, “Teacher, do you not care if we perish?” And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, “Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”¹

Fantastic, dramatic ending there. So what's going on here? A few aspects of the Gospel that I want to highlight here is just the context of the Sea of Galilee. I’ve

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

mentioned in other videos before, the Sea of Galilee, it's not an ocean, but it's not a tiny pond either. At its widest point, it's about 7 or 8 miles wide. So to be in a small boat in the middle of the sea in the midst of a storm — which the Sea of Galilee is known for having storms whip up rather quickly on the waters there — would have been a very dangerous and very terrifying situation to be in. So what's going on here is they're in the midst of crossing the Sea of Galilee — going from one side to the other as Jesus was wont to do in His public ministry in Galilee and round thereabouts — and a storm breaks out. And you can see it's not just any storm, because Mark calls it a great storm. So this is a really powerful thunder and wind and rain storm whipping up very quickly. And it's so strong that the waves begin to beat into the boat, and the boat is beginning to fill.

Now, if you've ever spent any time out on the water in a boat, if you like to fish or you like to sail, you'll know there's nothing more beautiful and peaceful than being out on the water in a boat on a shiny, beautiful, calm, peaceful day. And likewise, there's nothing more terrifying than being out on the water in the middle of a storm. And weather can change rather dramatically on the water, and when that happens, it's very, very dangerous. It's very terrifying, and people often drown and they often perish that way. So in this case, the storm is so violent that the boat is not just... it's not just that the waves are rough, but they're lapping the boat and it's beginning to fill.

Now when that happens, it's usually a sign that you're going to perish. But this is pre Coast Guard days, right? There's nobody to rescue the apostles and other fishermen in Galilee from such a storm and to swim 4-5 miles in stormy waters to the bank is an unlikely thing for most people. They wouldn't make it out alive.

So they're really in danger of death here, and we don't want to underestimate the danger that they're feeling and the terror that they're feeling. And what's so strange about that is when all of that is going on, at that moment, Mark says these shocking words:

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion... (Mark 4:38a)

So everything, all of the heavens are breaking loose against the apostles, and Jesus is taking a nap. So the contrast between the terror and violence of this storm and the peace and the calm of Jesus that He's actually able to nap in the midst of it, is a very striking, shocking kind of contrast... just on a human level. So it's not unreasonable, and it's completely natural, that the apostles respond to this by saying:

“Teacher, do you not care if we perish?”

Because it seems as if He doesn't care what's happening; He doesn't care what's happening. He's more concerned with just resting and taking His nap. So they awake Him, they wrestle Him out of sleep, and He awakes, and His first act is to rebuke the wind and to speak to the sea. So note this, two elements, very important. He rebukes the wind and He commands the sea:

“Peace! Be still!”

And then two effects:

And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Meaning, the waters calmed down. So Jesus exercises power over these two elements, wind and waves. And then He turns to the disciples and asks a startling question:

“Why are you afraid?”

Now on a human level, once again, the answer is pretty obvious — because a storm broke out, the boat was sinking, the waves were lapping, and we were about to die. We're all about to die. So He says:

“Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?”

Now this is a great example of how the word faith in the New Testament, *pistis* in the English transliteration, doesn't just mean intellectual ascent to a certain set of

propositions. So I can proclaim the faith, make a profession of faith when I confess the articles of the Creed publicly. When Jesus says to the apostles, “Why do you have no faith?” He’s not saying, “Why aren’t you monotheists?” or “Why don’t you believe in the Scriptures of Israel?” That’s not what He’s talking about. He’s not talking about propositional faith or intellectual faith — the ascent to certain articles or truths of the faith. He’s talking about *pistis* and the other meaning it can have — namely, trust. Faith and trust are both legitimate translations of this word.

So what He means here is: “Why don’t you trust God? Why don’t you believe that God has the power to save you, even in the midst of deadly dangers such as you’re facing now?” So in response to that question:

And they were filled with awe, and said to one another...

And this is very important. In fact, it’s the climax of the story, so it’s the heart of it:

“Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?”

So in essence, the question “who” is a question about Jesus’ identity. Who is this person who can command even the wind and the sea? And that’s where Mark leaves it. He doesn’t answer the question. He leaves that open; he ends with that question so that you as a reader are supposed to ask, “Well, who is this?” Where does the answer lie?

In this case of Mark 4, I’ve actually done a whole chapter on this in my book *The Case for Jesus* in the chapter “Did Jesus teach that He was God?” And one of the things I show is this is one of the miracles of Jesus which clearly reveal His divine identity. Who is this? It’s the God of the universe become man. But that they do it in an implicit way. Jesus doesn’t answer the question by saying, “Hey, I’ll tell you who I am. I’m the second person of the Trinity. I’m the eternal uncreated Son of the Father.” He wants you to infer from the context — from His words and His actions — what the answer to that question is. He wants you, He wants His disciples to answer with faith, “Who is this person?”

And in this case, the answer to this question really lies (as so often is the case) in the Old Testament — the Old Testament background. Because if you look at Mark 4 and you read it in light of the Old Testament, in particular in light of one psalm, Psalm 107, there are a number of striking parallels between Psalm 107 and Mark 4 that give you a key to interpreting the event. I don't have time to read the whole psalm — I go through this in more detail in *The Case for Jesus*, so you can check that out if you want to read a little more about this. But let me just look at Psalm 107:27-31. Listen to these words with the stilling of the storm by Jesus in mind. The psalm says this, verse 23:

Some went down to the sea in ships,
doing business on the great waters;
they saw the deeds of the Lord,
his wondrous works in the deep.
For he commanded, and raised the stormy wind,
which lifted up the waves of the sea.
They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths;
their courage melted away in their evil plight;
they reeled and staggered like drunken men,
and were at their wits' end.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;
he made the storm be still,
and the waves of the sea were hushed.
Then they were glad because they had quiet,
and he brought them to their desired haven.
Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to the sons of men!

There are several striking parallels between Psalm 107 and the stilling of the storm. Number one, the psalm begins with this description of sailors who are in ships doing business on the waters. They're probably fishermen, the ordinary business that you do in the water so trade is possible as well. But there are sailors in ships. Likewise, when Jesus stills the storm, the disciples (many of whom are fisherman) are in boats on the waters.

Number two, a storm of both wind and waves rises up. Likewise, in the stilling of the storm, you've got the winds come up quickly and the waves begin to mount the boat.

Number three, in Psalm 107, the courage of the sailors melt away. They become terrified, which is a strong statement, because normally, sailors are known for being courageous people. They brave dangers and death every time they go out on the water, but when a storm comes up, their courage just melts away. Same thing — the disciples here become afraid in the face of the storm.

Number four, in Psalm 107, as a response to the storm rising up, the soldiers cry out to — this is important — to the Lord. Now when you see all caps “the LORD” in an English Bible, that's a translation of the Holy Name of God, YHWH — the Tetragrammaton is what it's called, the name of the God of Israel. So in the Old Testament, they cry out to the God of Israel, to the Lord, but in the Gospel, who do they cry out to? They cry out to Jesus: “Are you worried that we're perishing? Save us!”

In the psalm, number five, it is God who stills the storm. He makes the winds stop; he makes the waves calm. In the Gospel, it's Jesus who stills the storm — calms the wind, calms the waves. And as a result, the waves of the sea are quiet; they're hushed. And likewise in the Gospel, as Mark says:

...and there was a great calm.

Now, these parallels aren't actually only in Mark 4. You can find the same story in Matthew 8 and Luke 8. So the stilling of the storm is one of the miracles of Jesus that's recorded in 3 out of the 4 Gospels. It's a very important miracle. It's a very important miracle. It's a very important act of Jesus, because when you read it in light of Psalm 107, when you read it in light of the Old Testament, and the parallels between it in Psalm 107, they are not coincidences. They clearly manifest the fact that Jesus — through His actions and His words — is revealing Himself to be the Lord come as man, to be the Lord come in person. He does things in the New Testament that God does in the Old Testament... and not just in the Old Testament,

in the book of Psalms, which would have been a very popular book. It would have been well known by Jews who sang the psalms, who chanted them either in synagogue or at the temple or both.

So this is a very powerful profile of Jesus where He meets the criteria for being one with the God of the Old Testament. So the answer, “Who is this, that even the winds and sea obey him?” If you were Jew and you know the Scriptures, you know, wait a second, the wind and seas obey the Lord. So who is this man, Jesus? He is the Lord, come in person.

So that’s the Gospel for today. You can find confirmation of this reading for today in the book of Job. So the first reading is from the book of Job — very powerful, very beautiful book of wisdom from the Old Testament — in Job 38:1, 8-11. If you know the story of Job, it’s very much about the power and providence of God. So the book of Job begins with all of Job’s ... first of all, it begins with Job being described as a very wealthy man, the wealthiest of men in his time and in his day in ancient areas. And then all is taken away from him. All of his children die on one day — his seven boys and three girls. I think that’s right, seven sons and three daughters, and they all perish in a storm on one day. So he doesn’t just lose one of his children; he loses them all. His crops are destroyed. His animals die, and he himself becomes sick with boils and all kinds of maladies that God allows him to be afflicted with at the instigation of Satan.

And so what ensues after that narrative is a long dialogue between Job and several friends of his over the problem of evil, over the problem of human suffering, and over the providence and power of God. And so this reaches a climactic moment in Job 38. It’s a very famous chapter where Job is wrestling with God and dialoguing with God back and forth, and God basically says to Job in the face of the questions: “Where were you when I founded the Earth?” It humbles Job as a creature rather than the creator.

And so the Church for this Sunday has taken a few verses from that famous chapter about the omnipotence of God, about the power of God, about God’s identity as creator, and gives us these verses. It says this, chapter 38, verse 1:

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind...

So pause there. This is a very famous line from Job — God speaking from the whirlwind. And whirlwind is just a kind of archaic term for what we would call a tornado. So again, powerful, terrifying when we think about a tornado and all those videos they make online about tornado chasers — people who actually film and drive into these absolutely terrifying storms. Well, God speaks to Job from that, manifesting His power and His divinity. And the lectionary actually skips the famous verse:

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?

That’s not the emphasis it wants to place. It wants to go down to verse 8 when it says:

“Or who shut in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, ‘Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed’?

So instead of focusing on the question, “Where were you when I created the world? Where were you when I laid the foundation of the Earth?” Here the lectionary is giving us God’s question to Job, “Who was it that set the boundaries for the sea? Who was it that set limits for the ocean? Who made the oceans? It was me. Who stilled the waves? It was I.” So in effect, what this dialogue is saying here is that God, the Lord, is the only one who has power enough to curb the power of the sea and to curb the power of the sky — which to this day, we all know this to be true, especially where I live in southeast Louisiana, where we face the threat of hurricanes on a regular basis.

There's simply no way to measure the magnitude of the power of water. It's indescribable. What water can do — its weight, its power, its energy — is so far beyond what we as human beings can really calculate or even imagine, that whenever a tsunami hits or a hurricane hits, we continue to be shocked and surprised at the absolutely devastating power of just a tiny piece of the ocean, just a tiny part. In our case, it's just the gulf; it's not even an ocean. It's just the Gulf of Mexico. So what God is saying here to Job is, "Yeah, I have power over the entire thing."

Now to really try to wrap your brain around that kind of power ... how much power are we talking about? Infinite power. Same thing with the wind, the power of a tornado or the power of a hurricane. The forces that mount up within the heart of a category 5 hurricane or T4, T5 tornado — it's hard to even wrap our brains around this. And yet, God controls it. He has power over it. He's infinitely above it.

So in Judaism, in a nutshell — this is the point. In the Jewish Scriptures, the person who has power over the sea, who has the kind of infinite power to control the sea and control the wind and the waves — there's only one person. No human being can do it. It doesn't mean if you're a king, it doesn't matter if you're a priest, it doesn't matter if you're a general in an army. No human being — we're tiny ants compared to the power of the sea or the power of the waves and the wind. There's only one person who has that power, and that person is God, the creator of the wind, the creator of the waves.

So the upshot of Job 38 again, when you read the stilling of the storm in the light of the book of Job ... although Jesus never says the words "I am God," He doesn't have to. In a Jewish context, for Him to calm ... to say to the sea, "Be still," to say to waves, "Be calm, be quiet" — no human being has that power. Only God has that power. So it's revealing His divinity. This miracle is a revelation of the divinity of Jesus.

And the Church knows this. This isn't just my interpretation in *The Case for Jesus* as a kind of apologetical move, although I'm certainly trying to give a reason for why we believe in the divinity of Jesus. It's just the mind and the heart of the Church. You can see that by looking at today's reading. What is the responsorial

psalm for today? Surprise, surprise. The responsorial psalm is Psalm 107, the psalm about the Lord stilling the storm.

And I won't read it, because I already did by doing the background to the Gospel story, but it's not a coincidence that verses 25 (about the sailors on the water), and verse 26 (about the fear of the sailors melting their courage away), or verse 28 (about them crying out to God in prayer to deliver them) — those are the verses that we chant today responsorially as we move from the old to the new in the lectionary, in the liturgy. So the Church knows this stuff. This is all part of her living tradition.

Alright, wonderful. What about — speaking of the Church tradition — what about the Church Fathers? Did anyone else interpret this passage as a revelation of Jesus' divinity? And the answer is, of course, yes. But I want to look at two key texts in particular — one of them a little more Christological or theological, and the other a little more spiritual and more morally focused.

So the first one is from St. Athanasius. So Athanasius was the bishop of Alexandria in the 4th century at the time of the great Arian heresy. Arius was a priest of Alexandria who argued — this is important — he denied the divinity of Jesus in a broad sense by arguing and making a very specific point. He argued that there was a time when the Son was not. In other words, he didn't just argue that Jesus wasn't divine. He argued that He was a creature, that He was created.

He thought Jesus was the highest of all creatures, but nevertheless, just a creature. And this was really the heart of the Arian heresy. His motto was, "There was a time when He was not." And Athanasius was one of several Church Fathers who rose up against Arius and the Arian heresy to argue not just for the divinity of Jesus, but for the fact that as Son of God, He was the uncreated eternal Son of the Father — in other words, that He was *not* a creature. And in one of his letters, St. Athanasius quotes *this* Gospel, the stilling of the storm, as evidence for belief in Jesus' identity as the creator of all things who has become man. So listen to his words. He says this:

“Even while he was asleep on the pillow, the Lord was testing his disciples... For when he arose and rebuked the sea and silenced the storm, he plainly disclosed... that the Lord who rebuked it was not a creature but rather its creator.”²

That’s from Athanasius’ *Letter* number 29. Okay, so what is Athanasius saying? By showing that He has power over the wind and the sea, Jesus reveals that He’s not just a creature. He is the creator of the universe who has now become man. And even though He becomes man, and He assumes a limited human nature, a human body that does take naps, that needs to rest ... that doesn’t mean as a divine person He no longer has power over His creation. He retains that power, and He exercises that power whenever He wants to manifest His divine identity, as He’s gradually revealing the mysteries of His divine identity to His disciples. He’s not the creature, but the creator.

And I throw this out to you — this might be a little nuanced, but I’ll make the point nevertheless. In a first century pagan context — I’m always talking about Jewish context, but I want you to think about a pagan context. Remember, the Gospel of Mark is probably written to Christians living in Rome in the first century, which is predominantly a pagan culture, pagan society. In a pagan context, it’s not enough to say that someone is a god or goddess. You’ve got plenty of gods and goddesses running around out there, like Zeus or Aphrodite who are still (within a pagan mindset) creatures. They’re not uncreated beings. They’re not eternal in their existence. They’re the highest creature; they’re more powerful than humans. They’re deities, but they’re not the creator of the entire universe in the way that the Jewish God is from the Scriptures.

So it’s not enough to say that Jesus is divine, because divine could mean, “Oh, He’s just the highest being out of all the created beings.” No, that’s enough. Athanasius and the Christian faith has to say Jesus isn’t a creature; He is the creator of all things. In Judaism, there is a line between the creator and all other creatures. Even the highest of the angels are still creatures. So in terms of the

² Athanasius, *Letter 29*; trans. in *NPNF2* 4:550

creator/creature divide, Jesus is on the creator side. That's what Athanasius is saying that the stilling of the storm reveals about Jesus' identity.

Alright, what's the relevance of that for us today? I'll give you a really wonderful, just breathtaking quote from St. Augustine. Many people, when they read Augustine, they read the *Confessions* — that's usually people's first stop — maybe they've read *The City of God*. It's longer, but it's still famous so you can find it at local bookstores or whatnot. But what we often forget is that Augustine was a preacher, because he was a bishop. And so we have multiple volumes of his *Sermons* that he preached in the cathedral as bishop of Hippo that people would transcribe and come down to us. So this is a collection of Augustine's *Sermons*. And here he has a sermon on the stilling of the storm. I just want you to read a quote where he takes it and does a spiritual reading of it and applies it to our individual lives. So this is what he says:

"I want to urge you not to let the faith sleep in your hearts against the storms and waves of this world. After all, it can scarcely be true that Christ the Lord had power over death, and did not have power over sleep, and that sleep possibly overtook the Almighty against his will, as he was out sailing..."

Then he goes down a little bit further. He says:

We are all of us temples of God, and every one of us is sailing a boat in his heart...

So he moves down into the heart.

You have heard an insult—it's a high wind; you've got angry—it's a wave. So as the wind blows and the waves break, the boat is in peril, your heart is in peril, your heart is tossed about. When you hear the insult, you are eager to avenge it; you do avenge it, and by giving way to someone else's evil, you suffer shipwreck. And what is that? Because Christ is asleep in you. What

does it mean, that Christ is asleep in you? *That you have forgotten Christ. So wake up, remember Christ; let Christ stay awake in you, think about him.*³

So that's Augustine's 63rd sermon, paragraph 1 and 2. What's Augustine getting at here? What he's doing, this is what the *Catechism* and the Church Fathers would call the moral sense of the text. So there are different meanings to the text. There's the literal sense. This is what the meaning the author is trying to convey through the words and the context. It's why I use the Greek and the Hebrew and all that kind of stuff. I'm trying to get at what the human author is intending to say.

But because there's not just a human author, there's also a divine author, the Holy Spirit. There are other levels of meaning. There's the moral sense, there's the allegorical sense, and there's the anagogical sense. I won't go into all three of those now. The allegorical sense tends to be more typological ... how does this relate, old and new (fulfillment)? Anagogical says, what does this tell us about Heaven? But the moral sense is what is the Holy Spirit saying to me through this text about my spiritual life, my life in Christ — the way I act, the way I live? And here what Augustine is doing is he's drawing out the moral sense of the text, and he's saying that the image of Christ asleep in the boat and the disciples fear and lack of faith is analogous...it's a kind of image for us, that each one of us is sailing a boat in his heart, and as the wind and waves of life raise up about us — the examples he uses here are insults. An insult is like a wind that strikes us from without, and he says "you've gotten angry." Your response is anger; it's a wave. A storm is breaking out because of someone else's sin and your sinful response to it.

And so as it starts to ... the wind and the waves start to break, your heart's in danger. Your heart's in danger, because your heart is like the boat. It's tossed about. And the reason it's in danger, the reason it's afraid, the reason you start to lose faith when everything around you looks like it's in chaos, is because Christ is asleep in you like He was asleep in the boat. And so how is it — this is a beautiful image — it says:

... wake up, remember Christ; let Christ stay awake in you...

³ Augustine, *Sermon* 63:1-2; trans. E. Hill

So that He can be the one who guides your boat through the wind and waves and so that He can be the one who calms the storm and who calms the winds. Because you don't have the power to do it anymore than the disciples did. But Christ *does* have the power to do it. But what happens is when it looks like things are being torn apart around us, when chaos breaks loose around us, we tend to forget that Christ has power over everything, that He has power over what's going on around us ... and that He can speak into it and calm the wind and still the waves.

And so Augustine's advice is to think about Christ. Here he's saying something very important in his spiritual theology, which is his use of memory — that one of the reasons we tend to sin and to lose faith is not because necessarily we're malicious (we have evil intent), it's just that we're forgetful. We forget who God is, we forget who Christ is. We forget that He dwells in us. We forget that we are all temples of the Holy Spirit. We forget the power that we've received in the sacraments. And just like in the Old Testament when the Israelites, it would say "And then they forgot the Lord," and then they sinned? The same thing is true for us. So what Augustine is effectively counseling us to do in this passage is to meditate regularly on Christ, the life of Christ, but also to remember Him throughout the day — the practice of the presence of God, to constantly punctuate our day with interior acts of recollection where we turn inward to Christ and we recall that He dwells in us. We recall that He's in control, no matter what's going on in our lives, and recall that He's the one steering the boat of our hearts toward our heavenly homeland.

And that's easy to forget, and when we forget it, we get afraid, and we tend to lose faith. So there's a lot of chaos in the world right now, there's a lot of confusion. There always has been — at least since Cain and Abel. Let's take St. Augustine's advice and ask ourselves, "What are the wind and the waves in our lives?" What are the wind and the waves in your life, and is Christ asleep in you? Or is He awake?