

Homily 19th Sunday of OT Year A 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13; Matt 14:22-33

Only a privileged few get through life without ever being in a boat tossed about on turbulent seas. Sometimes we're even worse off than the disciples, because there's no one else with us, as the winds whip up, the waves crash over, and the clouds come closing in.

The boat takes many forms – the world-sized ark of a global pandemic, a battleship nation beset by violence and strife, a body in bed stricken by sudden disease, the bottle or syringe embroiled in rapids of addiction, the one-man raft that is loneliness, the sturdy ship of financial security, suddenly sinking with holes in its hull, the long-term relationship turned loveless and cold.

How do we avoid being shipwrecked, and sail safely into harbor instead? Cry out like Peter did, right? "Lord, save me!" Surely, the Lord wants us to call out to him always, but his hope is that our cries not be those of panic and fear, borne of little faith, but those of courage and confidence, borne of steadfast faith.

We can avoid the former and offer the latter, by not waiting to cry out to God, only as a last resort, when we're on the verge of going under. There are different reasons why this might happen.

Maybe we're angry at God, for allowing us to get stranded in the storm in the first place, and out of spite, we're gonna show him a thing or two, and get through it all by ourselves.

Maybe we're simply unaccustomed to inviting God into our daily lives, and so turning to him early on when life gets a little crazy isn't the first thing that comes to mind. We get so consumed by trying to stay afloat using our own resources, that staying connected to God isn't a high priority.

One real life example of how this happens. There's a family in my family, whose practice of their faith was sporadic at best, in their first few years as a family. When they had their third child, and shortly thereafter, my mom and I began asking when would be a good time to celebrate the baptism.

After repeated requests were ignored, we kinda gave up on pressing the issue. Now both parents have high profile jobs, and they're on call a lot. The husband was transitioning into a new job, which required the purchase of a new house, before selling the old one, and living away from home for days at a time.

There were issues around the wife phasing out of her job to be a stay at home mom, and a few health concerns with the kids. So in the midst of all this, the baptism was put on the back burner, if not put back in the fridge, and the faith life went from sporadic to zip.

Eventually, they reestablished a more normal routine. The old house was sold, all were together in the new one, kids were healthy, Mom was home with them full time. Once they had everything under control, they were hot n' heavy to schedule the baptism, and get connected to their local parish.

Only then did they feel like they could invite God in ... as if God couldn't have handled their chaos. Only then were they ready to make time for God, since more pressing matters didn't require their attention. // But I ask you, wouldn't the transition have been smoother and less stressful, if they gave God a seat in the boat from the start?

To avoid that scenario from playing out in our lives, we could take a few pointers from the disciples, Elijah, and Jesus. Might as well start at the top. Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray. He did so regularly. Why?

I mean he never sinned his whole life; he loved all people perfectly; he faithfully followed the will of His Father. In fact, he was never not connected to the Father – theirs was, and is, an ongoing exchange of love in the Holy Spirit.

Still, he needed quiet time alone to engage the Father in prayer. And if **He** needed it, we do too ... and we need to do it all the more faithfully and fervently. We need to be as vigilant in prayer as the disciples were at keeping watch upon those troubled waters. Remember, Jesus didn't approach until the **4th watch** of the night.

And so are we willing to watch and wait for the Lord to come in *his time*? Are we open to his coming to us in ways we might not at first recognize? // Elijah probably expected to see God in some earth-shattering revelation. After all, that was the experience Moses had on the very same mountain.

But when God was not to be found as expected in either the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, Elijah didn't give up and head back to the cave saying, "Oh well, guess he's not coming after all." He had faith in the promise that God would be passing by. He allowed for the possibility that God might surprise him.

PAUSE It takes effort to "climb up the mountain" and make possible a personal encounter with God ... to find the time and place where we can tune everything else out, and tune in to the Lord. And there's some risk involved in putting ourselves out there for deeper communion with him.

Elijah risked the relative security of the cave; Peter risked the relative safety of the boat. Both were rewarded. The risk for us? Often it's just a matter of missing a favorite tv show, or forgetting Face Book friends for a few, or surfing fewer waves on the worldwide web, or spending one less hour in bed.

Doesn't seem like much does it? So it's surprising how often we're unwilling to set aside these kinds of things, in order to reach out to God in prayer. But if we want to do better than Peter, who failed to keep his eyes fixed firmly on Jesus, when he thought disaster would wash him away, then we must prepare.

And it's true: practice makes perfect. So when the wind's but a breeze, and the water's serene, on those sunny, trouble free days ... we must disconnect, from distractions and duties alike, and make a daily connection to God.

Then should catastrophe come to disturb or destroy, we won't be terrified, frozen in fear ... or worry, if God doesn't seem near. Nor will we miss the message he speaks ... should it be just a whisper, in our ear.