



August 7, 2011 The Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" —Matthew 14:31

Dear Friends;

Last week I was waiting to pick up a prescription at the pharmacy. I noticed that the pharmacist (whom I know and is a member of our parish) was on the phone. I could tell it was a complicated problem he was trying to deal with because his voice had a mix of compassion and frustration in dealing with the complexities of medical plans, pharmaceutical company discounts and patients etc. I had been having a similar complicated day. Knowing that there was no full moon, I said to him "Doesn't it feel as if it's a full moon week?" He laughed and said "It sure does." Sometimes it feels as if chaos is in the air.

Matthew tells us that it was the fourth watch of the night that disciples were being battered about in their boat in the Sea of Galilee. The time is 3AM. That's the time when we lay awake and worry about the problems of our day. It is the time when parents await the return of a child who has been out past curfew. It is the time when we receive that phone call we have been dreading. It is the time when we give free reign to all our deepest anxieties and we toss and turn like a boat battered on the sea.

In the midst of the storm Jesus comes walking on the waves. The disciples had just seen him hours before miraculously multiply the loaves and fish and feed thousands. Yet they doubt—it's just a phantasm, a figment of our imagination. So Peter impetuously asks "if it is you, invite me to walk with you." And so Jesus does. Peter is all right until he takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at the wind and waves. And he sinks, until Jesus grabs him by the arm.

Back in the 1950' Roger Bannister was a track star at Oxford University in England. He was so good that his coach thought he could break the four minute mile which no one had ever done before. Roger was not sure but his coach believed in him. On May 8, 1954 Roger got up to look out and see that it was a cold and windy day—bad for a race. He called his parents and told them not to come he would not be able to run fast that day. They came anyway.

A small crowd was there for the race. The runners lined up, the gun shot went off and he ran a mile in three minutes fifty nine seconds the first man to break a four minute mile. Two weeks later a Canadian, John Landy, became the second to man to accomplish this feat.

Several months later a race was set up in Canada between Banister and Landy. In the race Landy the Canadian led the whole time. Then in the final straightaway he did something he should not have done. He looked over his shoulder to see how far behind Bannister was. This was all Bannister needed. He took the lead and won the race.

In the storms and races of life we can get tossed about or lose our footing if we take our eyes off the goal. Both Peter and John Landy learned what that means. In the fourth watch of the night it can be too easy to be battered about by our fears and anxieties. And when we focus on our fear we look away from the one who comes to us walking on the water.

In these days of: continued high unemployment, a slow economy, threats of losing home or job, personal problems, past sins, feeling unable to respond to all the needs and demands of family and work, we can feel overcome. Yet we cannot focus on these. Look there are others in the boat—we are not alone. And there is Jesus. Fix your eyes on Jesus and don't look away. It is he who calms the storms of time.

Blessed Pope John XXIII must have had a similar fourth watch experience. Because one night he wrote in his diary, "Lord, it is you Church, I am going to sleep now." There is an act of faith that does not look to the wind and waves but to the Jesus who passes them by.

Peace,

Fr Ron