

12th SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - 2006
“Hope in Darkness”

A storm is raging. A boat is tossed around in the churning sea like a cork. The men on board are terrified. And Jesus, oblivious to it all, is sound asleep on a cushion. It's crisis time. Time to do something ... or else. But what do you do? What can you do? The disciples do the only thing they can. They wake up Jesus; a Jesus, by the way, at whom they are now a little miffed. They see him as totally unconcerned with the danger they're in. *“Teacher, doesn't it matter to you that we are going to drown?”* Note, they had concluded that they are going to drown! The situation is hopeless. All they can do is to blame Jesus for not caring, like the mess they are in is somehow his fault. So, Jesus, after he wakes up, calms the sea, and then asks two questions. The first seems almost stupid. *“Why are you terrified?”* And the second sounds totally irrelevant: *“Why are you lacking in faith?”* as if faith had anything to do with the situation.

Could Jesus possibly be preparing his disciples for a future crisis, one in Jerusalem that would make this crisis on the turbulent sea pale by comparison? Jesus would be arrested, mocked, brutalized and then crucified before their very eyes. He would die! And with his death, all their hopes would die also, especially those of finally sticking it to the Romans. It would appear to the disciples that all hope is lost. Jesus wants to help them get through that crisis, a crisis that would change their lives forever. It is not by accident that that darkest of hours is the very hour that Jesus wants his followers to remember. Regardless of their fears, hope is not lost. After the darkness of Good Friday, there would be the dawning of a whole new day.

To give them hope in the face of this pending crisis, and those to follow down through time, Jesus eats a Last Supper with his disciples. He

takes bread and identifies himself with it, and does the same with the wine and then commands them, “*Do this in memory of me.*” Why at this time? Because Jesus knew that this moment of crisis, like when they were in the boat, that they would wonder if God had abandoned them. They would wonder if the marvels that Jesus had performed, his message of love, his compassion, care for the poor were all a hoax? The crisis of faith the disciples were to undergo would be a turning point in their lives. They had to go through it.

Times of crisis are often turning points in our lives, and we must go through them. As Father Timothy Ratcliff, O.P. who spoke at our Priest Days said this week, giving birth is a moment of crisis. Being weaned is a moment of crisis. Entering adolescence is a moment of crisis, as is entering the world of adult love. Facing one’s mortality is a moment of crisis. And as we pass through each crisis, we may wonder if we are not alone. Have we been abandoned? Does anyone understand? Is God asleep in our boat? Today’s gospel story and each Eucharist we celebrate reminds us that even at our darkest moments, we have no reason to be afraid if we believe that the Spirit of God is with us. In fact, if we bring faith to each crisis in our lives, even at moments of apparent defeat, we can grow in our intimacy with God.

Times of crisis are meant to be times of growth. As Father Timothy said, when Jesus died on the cross, the disciples had to give up their false idol of Jesus as a mighty, warrior king. And it was a false idol. Jesus was a servant king, or servant shepherd to be exact. That is the real Jesus! Rather than be worried about who was the greatest among them, a constant issue for them, the disciples had to give up their idol of self-importance because they were so utterly humbled by the love that Jesus had for them. When times of crisis enter our lives, we can run (like the disciples did), look for someone to

blame (like they did in the boat), or face them with hope together. Today's gospel calls us to face them with hope together, and so does the Eucharist we celebrate.

Father Timothy spoke of the polarization we are feeling in the church today, liberal/conservative; pre-Vatican II/post Vatican II, new vs. old; service vs. holiness, as if they were mutually exclusive, which they're not. As a church we are going through a moment of crisis. We can run from it, blame someone for it, or face it with hope together. But to run is to run away from a chance to grow up as a church. To play the blame game is to deepen the crisis and the polarization. We have one viable option left: to share hope together. To make those who disagree with us enemies, is to make them, what I would call, negative idols. It makes them someone we can destroy and feel like we are doing something pleasing to God. Well, to attack or damage one another in the church is not pleasing to God. The truth is we are all brothers and sisters in Christ. That is our real identity! The work of the Spirit unites us as members of the Body of Christ. To call those who differ from us evil or bad cannot be the work of the Spirit because it separates and divides.

This is one problem I have with some things I hear on Sacred Heart Radio like, "*The new priests coming up are good priests, the kind we need today.*" The sly implication is that old priests, the ones who tried to implement Vatican II, are not good. As an old priest, I'm sensitive to that kind of talk. Such talk can only divide us or make us suspicious of one another. At Ocean Shores, the convention center was filled with good priests, good men, with good hearts, young and old. We are not of the same stripe, as some see things differently than others (thanks be to God), and we're certainly not all saints, but we're all are men of faith and share in the

priesthood of Jesus Christ. Litmus tests of good and bad are dangerous. There is far more that unites us than divides us. And the Spirit of Jesus is present in all and works through all. As Father Timothy said, “*To preach an ideology is not to preach the gospel.*” Only the truth of the gospel can guide us through these difficult times.

WE end the Eucharist Prayer with the Great Amen. AS Father Timothy says, that is our “Amen to Hope.” The Eucharist is our story of hope when times are dark. As we offer ourselves in union with Jesus to the Father, we renew our commitment to give up the idols of power, possessions and influence, and recommit to the power of love. For it is the Spirit of love that we have been given. May this Eucharist continue the transformation of our hearts.