

WHEN THE WIND IS CONTRARY **Meditations by Subdeacon Dr. Joshua D. Genig**

On St. Matthew 14:22 – 34

(Gospel for the 9th Sunday After Pentecost, 21 August 2016)

St. Innocent Orthodox Church, Redford, MI



In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There are some people who like storms, but I am not one of them. It's not that I don't like a few dark clouds and the cooling of the summer sun and even a good rain. No, what I don't like is when a storm does damage. Nor do I like it when the satellite dish goes out...especially during a game! But I digress...

Certainly you and I have not had it as bad as the folks in Louisiana these past few days. In fact, I recently heard that something like 30,000 people had to be rescued from their homes by boat.

There are storms, and then there are Storms, capital "S". And in today's Gospel, it is the latter.

"Now when evening came" says St. Matthew, "[Jesus] was alone on the mountain praying." But the boat, carrying the 12 disciples, was now in the middle of the sea, "tossed by the waves, for the wind was," as Matthew says, "**contrary.**"

The wind was **contrary**. And, as it says in the text, **the boat was being tortured**. The wind was contrary and the boat was being tortured.

This, of course, was not the first storm for these disciples. Just six chapters earlier, as Matthew says, "a great tempest arose on the sea." Same intensity. Same fear. Same capital "S" kind of Storm. So what makes this storm so different from that storm? What makes this storm so different is that, back then, Jesus was in the boat, but today, he is in the water.

And please don't let that seemingly minor detail pass you by. In fact, it is **this detail** that tells the full story. Listen to St. John Chrysostom:

*"The disciples are tossed on the waves **again**. They are in a storm, fully as bad as the previous one. Gently and by degrees he excites and urges the disciples on toward greater responsiveness [...]. [...] In the previous storm they had him with them in the ship, now they are alone by themselves. [...] Now he is leading them into a greater degree of challenge. Now he is not even present to them. He has departed. In mid-sea he permits a storm to arise. This was all for their training, that they might not look for some easy hope [...]. He [...] allows them to be tossed by the storm all night! [...] This is how Jesus dealt with the nature of their fear, which the rough weather and the timing had produced. He cast them directly into a situation in which they would have a greater longing for him [...]."*
(The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 50.1)

"He cast them directly into a situation in which they would have a greater longing for him." That puts a whole new perspective on this Gospel, does it not? And, of course, it puts a whole new perspective on our own lives, our own struggles, our own fears, and our own **storms**.

They are all different, yes. Your storm is not my storm is not their storm. But they are all storms. And to each of us, the wind is "**contrary.**" To each of us, the tiny boat of our own lives is being **tortured**. But that's why it's important to remember that, amid all of these storms, amid the rough waves and the gusting wind, amid all of that, we need to be, not in our own little boat, tossed about by every trouble that comes our way, but we need to be in the ark—the ark like Noah's ark, the ark that made it through the flood, the ark that saved eight souls, giving us a picture, a symbol, a hint of how God would save us all.

Dear brothers and sisters, amid the storms of life, we need to be in the boat of the Church, the very ark of our salvation. For it is here, and only here, in regular contact with Christ and His gifts; it is only here, and only here, the most important place in all the world; it is here, and only here, that we can be saved.

It is only here that our storms can be calmed and, most importantly, that we can grow and mature and become the kind of people, the kind of Christians, that Christ created us, called us, and died for us to be.

Yes, St. Augustine was right: "the devil strives to keep the wind from calming down," he says, "but greater is he who is persistent on our behalf [...]. He comes to us and strengthens us, so we are not jostled in the boat and tossed overboard. For although the boat is thrown into disorder, it is still a boat. It alone carries the disciples and receives Christ. [...] **Therefore stay inside the boat** and call upon God. [...] When all human help and strength have been abandoned, the only recourse left for the sailors is to cry out to God" (*Sermon 75.4*).

And will he not, asks Augustine, come to our aid as well? Indeed, he will. For he, alone, is good and loves mankind.

In the Name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.