

## FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT

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*Ezekiel 37: 12-14*

*Romans 8: 8-11*

*John 11: 1-45*

Times like these invites creativity and calls us to do things differently despite our reluctance and fear. Simple things we often take for granted require more thought and attention.

Today, I will try something new with my homily. I'm going to give a homily based on a meditation I heard this week. Perhaps, you heard it too. It was the meditation on the calming of the storm Pope Francis gave on Friday at the "*Urbi et Orbi*" Prayer Service. "*Urbi et Orbi*" is Latin for, "to the city and to the World" (the city being Rome) and it is a blessing given on a special occasion that offers those who participate a plenary indulgence.

If you haven't seen it, I strongly recommend you do.

Before I even get to the meditation itself, I must say something about the setting of this prayer service. It took place at dusk. In Rome. There were dark clouds in the sky and it was raining. St. Peter's Square was empty all but for a few fire pits scattered around and an image of the Blessed Mother and a 15<sup>th</sup> century Crucifix of our Lord and from this desolate scene the Holy Father emerged, by himself, in his white cassock, a stark contrast to the gray slick cobblestone pavement and ancient buildings surrounding him, and he walked slowly up a sloping staircase (without an umbrella) and took his place in front of a single chair.

That image alone encapsulated for me this pandemic and our Christian hope. The world covered in darkness and gloom and a single person, the Pope, the symbol of the universal Church and the presence of Christ in the world—a light standing amid a sea of gray. If that all there were it would have been enough for me—at the sight I was suddenly filled with comfort and consolation—then the gospel was chanted and the Holy Father began his meditation with these words from the fourth chapter of Mark's gospel, "When evening had come."

He related the "evening" to the darkness we all are experiencing in this pandemic. Even as our western hemisphere emerges from the season of winter and new life is seen in rising temperatures, blossoming trees and flowers we are faced with fear, isolation, sickness and death. A priest friend recounted that the Great Flu Pandemic of 1918 took place in the autumn. This one, he says, is more cruel since it brings death during the season of new life.

The Pope's meditation is centered on the familiar story of the apostles crossing the Sea of Galilee and a turbulent storm stirs up and they are in panic and fear and even exclaim, "We are perishing!" Which he admits was understandable given the circumstances, but what was more difficult to comprehend was why Jesus was asleep in the boat? And when he awakes after he calms the wind, he turns to the apostles and asks, "Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?"

Amid that storm they think that Jesus doesn't care about them—because he is sleeping—but there is no one who cares about us more than the Lord. Feeling this way is understandable because as the pope describes, "the storm exposes our vulnerabilities and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities. It shows how we have allowed ourselves to become dull and feeble to the very things that nourish, sustain and strengthen our lives and our communities." One of the most poignant parts of his meditation is when he says, "We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: "Wake up, Lord!"

In other words, we were unaware of the consequences of our actions or thinking that somehow we were immune to the sinful ways of the world, but now we recognize our need for healing and conversion and demand the help of the Lord. The Holy Father points out that the Lord, in this story, stands in the stern of the boat, the part that sinks first. Think about that. The Lord puts himself in the most vulnerable place. He does not stand in judgment but stands with us in our time of need.

He stands with those who are suffering the most.  
He stands with those who are on the front lines of this pandemic.  
He stands with those who are most at risk.  
He stands with those who are isolated and separated from loved ones.  
He stands with those who must change his/her usual way of conducting business and cope with the frustrations and sacrifices this causes.  
And he stands with those who are afraid and lack faith.

"Faith," the pope says, "begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient, by ourselves we flounder: we need the Lord, like the ancient navigators needed the stars."

In the gospel today, Martha confronts her need for the Lord when she says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." She is angry and upset that he didn't come sooner, yet amid her grief and uncertainty she discovers her faith, "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who is coming into the world."

My brothers and sisters, amid this current storm we will confront our own fears and anxieties but let us not lose hope in the Lord who stands with us. Let us learn to set aside

human pride and cling to what is truly important in life and see this storm as an opportunity to reorient our life to Christ and embrace his cross. And in the words of Pope Francis, “only the Lord can calm this storm. He is our anchor, our rudder and our only hope.”

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