

12th Sun (B)

23rd June 2024

'In the same boat: one planet, one Church'

Job 38: The Lord is the creator of the seas

2Cor 5: *in Christ there is a new creation ...*

Mk 4: 35–41: *'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey Him.'*

I've only ever seen the Sea of Galilee calm as a mill pond! — and generally warm & sunny, too, though often hazy. Yet we know from the Gospel that this isn't always the case. The predicament of the Apostles when faced with the waves puts me in mind of my days as a teenager when we'd have weekend 'sailing camps' by the lakes in Cheshunt (Herts) with the Scouts. It brought it all flooding back (so to speak): the thrill of being out on the water; the occasional capsized dinghy; the time one of the scouts upended the boat so much that the mast was stuck in the mud at the bottom of the lake! Sailing was always a precariousness business, especially in a brisk wind, and you could never completely rely on your own resources. I never became that proficient: dinghy sailing always remained for me a cause of some anxiety!

Being on the water was a natural part of the lives of Christ's disciples, many of them being fisherman from the surrounds of the Lake of Galilee. Yet they also knew the

treachery of the waves when a sudden storm arose, and could not trust in their own skills against the might of nature. They didn't appreciate that they could have relied on Jesus's power: they just panicked.

Our Lord's powerful word to the natural elements uttered on the Sea of Galilee — "*Quiet! Be calm!*" — brought such a sense of awe to the Apostles out there in the storm. They began to know Him more truly as *God*, as the Lord of Creation Himself. How extraordinary it must have been to be there on that boat as Jesus calmed the wind and waves with the briefest of commands! Whatever the Apostles' estimation of Jesus up to then — and we're only in *Mk ch. 4*, don't forget! — now they surely knew Him to be the very same who had *created* the natural world. We profess every Sunday in the Creed that God is the "*Maker of all things, visible and invisible*" — and then we profess the Son of the God to be Him "*through whom all things were made.*" This beautiful natural world, earth, this one planet that we have as home, is a stunning gift of the Creator God to His beloved human creation. It's concerning our stewardship of the world — "care for our common home" —

that the Pope's ground-breaking Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, released in 2015 but updated last year (*Laudate Deum*, 2023) speaks. Much has been made of the Pope's forthright comments on climate change, though of course he doesn't go any further than good current science indicates about that. But the Pope's concerns are more particularly for the *poor*, for the better care for our worldly home so as to benefit humanity more justly — *all* her children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable.

The title of that Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, was taken from the opening words of St Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*, written back in 1225, a year before his death. One of the verses of his sacred poem runs:

*Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother
Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces
various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.*

St Francis reflects in his *Canticle* the harmony of man with Nature, for we are part of that great act of God's kindness, even though we are also its most special part, set above it by God. But we are set above it to be its *guardian* and not its abuser. Sadly, too often, we have chosen through greed and

laziness, instead, to be the world's abuser, and the environment can suffer degradation.

In our attempts to be *carers* of our environment, I expect we try to each do our bit anyway, don't we? We are obliged nowadays to recycle much of our waste, to use low-energy lightbulbs, to insulate our homes well ... And I am sure that we all do our best to waste as little water as possible, not to throw away too much food, and to seek out the 'FairTrade' label on supermarket items. These would all seem to be good Christian attitudes to the conservation of our environment. The world given us by God is a gift, and we should use that gift well, and not in wasteful or indifferent ways. We must also remember that the gift is given to all humanity, and we have a duty to do our best to see that the world's resources are equitably shared. This may often seem a colossal task, given the centuries of greed that have made many inequalities almost set in stone.

The Pope calls on us to renew our vision of the earth as our "common home" — the home for all humanity — and to be reminded that it is, first and foremost, God's own Creation. He urges us to live simply, not to grab and grasp,

but to give thanks for what we have and to be content with less. The Pope believes that many of the world's ills — the scourge of abortion; the ravaging of the ecology; lamely blaming 'overpopulation'; the lack of political will to deal with world hunger; the abandonment of many of the elderly in our society to loneliness — are all interlinked, in human sins of rebellion against the Creator.

Let me give some words to Pope Francis himself (*Laudato Si'*, n. 13), in a paragraph he entitles, 'My Appeal':

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; He never forsakes His loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

Let's be among those who hope, pray, and work in our own little way for that change, for a respect and care for God's beautiful world. It's only *one world* we have, so we're all in the same boat!

But there's another whole dimension to this episode on Lake Galilee, no less important. So: not just the *miracle* over the created order that proves Jesus to be '*Lord of Creation*' with our resulting mandate to care for that same Creation. But also Our Lord's personal relationship with the Apostles in their crisis — *Lord of their hearts* — such that the historical event becomes a *parable* of the spiritual life.

Early Fathers of the Church often speak of the Church as being like a boat — the *barque of Peter* is a term well used by them. In other words, the Church is tossed on the waves of the world, but is never sinkable, because within her the Son of God has laid Himself down, and He will never let it be lost. (The Church is no passing phase in the world history ... the Church is here to stay!) But, as in this passage from the Gospel, Jesus will sometimes let the Church have a rough ride. Even in storms, the ride can be made smoother or rougher according to the behaviour — the faithfulness — of

the members of the Church. When problems beset the Church we must respond in *faith*: we believe that Jesus dwells in His Church and that God's Holy Spirit does guide her; that He inspires the Pope and the bishops together to teach the truth, and that therefore it is right that we live our life to the very best of our ability in conformity with their apostolic teaching ... all of us in the same boat!

In our difficulties, God is never far away. To Job — long-suffering, patiently suffering, tormented Job — God answered out of the heart of the tempest, assuring Job that He was Lord of all creation and therefore the Holy One who knew all that Job needed; and with the disciples in that boat, Jesus was in the heart of the storm with them, absolutely, no question, at one with them. He's no absentee God, just there to be called in to fix things when they go wrong — He's not gone away, He's right there, right *here* all the time. The pertinent question is: Do *you* sometimes leave Him to 'slumber' except when you're in a panic?

If you have let Jesus 'fall asleep' (as it were) in your heart, remember Him and rouse Him, pray anew, and pray often, and pray more fervently. Rouse Him, let Him know

you want that passionate, daily dialogue with Him. None of us is able to quieten the tempests on our own — you must have Jesus's help. Let *Him* calm the storms in yourself (the panic or doubts about life) and let *Him* renew your peace by assuring you of the vital importance of your place in a steady vessel progressing towards the haven of heaven.

Creation of course — the wind and the waves — simply obey the Creator, but to us He gives a *freedom*. He rebukes the storm and it obeys forthwith. He rebukes us for our lack of faith, but ... well, we don't necessarily obey. We each still have to take that responsible free decision to *opt for Him*. And yet surely it would seem obvious that it's better to be buffeted and *in the boat* with a divine Guide & Companion, than to be overboard without any support or guidance in life, drowning in all our options and confusions.

Quiet now! Be calm! Jesus calls to us. How can we hear that reassuring voice unless He and we are all in the same boat? We are eternally blessed to be together with Jesus in the *barque of Peter*, and in this His holy Church He will safely lead us home.