

19th Sunday (A)

9th August 2026

‘O still, small voice of calm’

1K 19: ‘Stand on the Mount before the Lord’ Ps 84: *the Lord God speaks of peace*

Rom 9: ‘I have great sorry and unceasing anguish ... for the sake of my brothers & sisters’

Mt 14: 22–33: ‘Command me to come to You on the water’

What’s the most surprising thing about Jesus and His disciples on the Sea of Galilee? Is it that Jesus walks on the water? Well, although it’s a great surprise for the disciples out that night on the lake, to walk on the water is no great feat for the Son of God. “*Through Him all things were made,*” we say each Sunday in the Creed. God Almighty, through His Word, God the Son, made all things to be. Is it any wonder that He who created all things can defy the elements? He who is “Lord of sea and sky” can walk on the water, still the waves, calm the wind.

It’s rather more surprising that *Peter* walks on the water. Almighty God can do all things, but He also wants us by faith in Him to do extraordinary things. Think of the martyrs who have gone to their death so as not to deny Jesus; the great works of charity which can be achieved by a person inspired by faith and love. Think of the founders of religious orders, and those who put their lives utterly at

the service of others. E.g. there’s a British man whose cause for canonization is open — John Bradburne — who was martyred in Zimbabwe at the height of the bloody civil war: he gave his life for refusing to abandon the many lepers with whom he lived, and for whom he cared, in a remote medical mission, choosing to stay with them long after it was deemed safe to do so. Heroic Christian witnesses like that abound. Or just think of the day-to-day life of the ordinary Christian trying to live a holy and moral life against the evil pressures of society at large. When we do what God calls us to — just as Jesus called Peter — we *can* ‘walk on water,’ doing things unexpectedly great, things we would have thought impossible just by ourselves.

But perhaps the most surprising thing is not that Jesus can walk on water, nor that He can command Peter to walk on the water, but that when Peter fails, Jesus’s hand is there. Jesus, the Son of God, wants to stretch out His hand to save this individual man, Peter, *even in the moment of His disbelief*. The amazing thing, then, is not that God can

do great things, but that the all-powerful God will do the smallest things. There is a saying of St Thomas Aquinas — I recall Pope Benedict writing of it, and Pope Francis also quoted it in his homilies — that goes like this: *non coerceri a maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est* (“not to be confined by the greatest, yet to be contained within the smallest, is divine”). In other words, yes, it is utterly divine to allow Himself to be ‘reduced,’ humbled, become small, rather than to cling on doggedly to His Almighty power and majesty. Perhaps man is reluctant to believe that Almighty God will stoop to the minimum. We are reluctant to believe we are loved like this. Much of mankind is happier to disbelieve in God at all, than to accept that the fundamental power in the universe is so loving to each individual person. Because once we believe that God does love us like this, personally, in the small, everyday ways ... putting out His hand to catch us when we fall, raising us up in our doubts and in our failings ... then we have to change, we have to respond, we have to make sacrifices to return this love. We have then to turn to

Him, in all His gentleness and say, as the apostles in that boat did: *Truly You are the Son of God!*

For it is not the power of God which is so impressive, but His personal touch, and His peace. Elijah knew the same in the cave on the mountain: God’s voice did not speak to Him in the wind, or the fire, or the earthquake, but in the gentlest whisper, the merest little breeze. That God comes to us with a gentle touch — this is what makes us listen. *I will hear what the Lord God speaks — He speaks of peace for His people.* It is that same principle at work again, that what is impressive about God — what impresses us most, and convinces us most — is His attention to the ‘minimum’ things, the little things, the *contineri a minimo* of Aquinas’s maxim: His speaking to us not in earthquake or thunder but in the gentle breeze, calling us to Himself in the quietest little voice.

The largest events I’ve ever been to as a Catholic have been the final events of ‘World Youth Days’ — my first, in 2000 in Rome, up to last year’s *Jubilee of Young People*, back in Rome for the Holy Year 2025. And if I

were asked what, of all the noisy, joyful, crazy youthfulness of WYDs I find most powerful and moving ... well, it would have to be the *silence* of the Adoration time at the Saturday night prayer Vigil. Through WYD weeks there are countless words, songs, testimonies, chanting, boisterous jubilation, homilies, hymns ... but at the end of the day it is — for me and perhaps for many — the wordless silence of 1 or 2 million youngsters praying before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on an altar perhaps a mile away, in the far distance across the vast crowds. It is the quiet, the utter quiet, not a word, not a murmur; thousands upon thousands, kneeling in silent Adoration of Jesus. Maybe you wouldn't think that 1+ million could be silent all together, but, I tell you, they can be! Those of you who've been to WYDs can testify with me to this: everyone kneeling, not a sound, for 10 mins or more.

We have to find the quiet, and Jesus offers it to us. We have to find the quiet — it's essential for a life of faith, prayer, and happiness. We cannot get through life all bustle, rush and noisiness; not happily. We need the quiet

in order properly to pray and hear the voice of the Spirit's promptings. Are you getting enough quiet in your life? Are you making sure you find a daily time for real quiet, undistracted, prayerful time to simply be with the Lord? If you notice, at the start of today's Gospel passage — long before he has brought peace and calm to the disciples in the boat in the distressing storm — Jesus Himself has found some peace, He's been at prayer; He has shaken off the crowds for a bit, gone out into the hills alone and communed with the Father. He shows that relationship with the Father *is* prayer; He models that relationship, and in His sacred humanity He shows that it can only be achieved by taking time out: precious time, a deliberate sacrificing of time for quiet and prayer. Are we making that time, every day? *We absolutely must*; it's as essential as eating and exercising and sleeping! Let's think about it! Are we truly making that commitment to quiet and prayer? Really, deliberately? Every day?

Jesus brings unfailingly a saving calm and a dispelling of fear to Peter and the apostles when they

finally appeal to Him; He can bring us peace and calm in the storms, the worries, the incessant concerns, but only if we're prepared to call on Him. If we offer Him that gift of quiet contemplation, He will offer us that greater, deeper, quiet of a contented heart. He does care; personally, individually, for the small and everyday things of our little life; He does want to calm the storms. Let's give Him the quiet and space to do so:

*I will hear what the Lord God has to say
A voice that speaks of peace
Peace for His people and His friends
And those who turn to Him in their hearts.
His help is near for those who fear Him
And His glory will dwell in our land.*

Ps 84 (85): 9–10