

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2026

Believe it or not, whenever I was in elementary school, I used to regularly sing, act, and play piano, in talent shows. I was actually pretty decent. One year, I even had the lead role in the school Christmas play. I was “Harsh Raider” and my goal was to abolish Christmas on earth and throughout the universe. It was a “Bah-humbug” kind of role.

All of this changed during a talent show in the 6th grade. I was in front of the entire student body singing “Rhinestone Cowboy” by Glen Campbell. There are some rather challenging high-pitched notes in the song. I got off key and could not recover. The entire auditorium erupted in laughter. I was totally humiliated and traumatized. As a result of that experience, I got a severe case of “stage fright.” So much so, I quit these activities that I had enjoyed so much because I lost faith in myself and my abilities.

Even though I refused to take the leap of faith and perform before others again, Jesus Christ still had faith in me. He eventually transformed and redirected those

energies and inclinations through my vocation to the priesthood. Now I am in front of crowds almost every day, even though I prefer behind the scenes and small group dynamics. Nonetheless, my sense of call has given me the faith and courage to do it for the sake of the Gospel. As Bishop William Friend used to say, “The things we do for Jesus.”

In today’s Gospel reading, we have a front row seat to Peter’s own struggle to take the “leap of faith.” I am confident that we can easily understand and empathize with his response. If we were in his shoes, we probably would have lost our nerve as well. At the same time, through this Gospel, Jesus is inviting us to the next level of faith. He is calling us to a faith that goes beyond just faith in ourselves and our own abilities. He is revealing the Good News that we do not have to go through life with our faith grounded primarily or exclusively in our intellect, willpower, social status, giftedness, physical strength, personal appearance, or charming and dynamic personality. Instead, we are called to daily tap into the power of God, which flows from cultivating and exercising of our faith. We do this by consciously inviting him into every dimension of our lives and every situation we are living through. It is our faith that unlocks the gift

of God's grace that transforms our perspective and response to the circumstances of our lives.

What life experiences tempt us to take our eyes off Jesus and lead us to begin to sink? Is it our fear of failure and rejection? The experience of suffering? Sickness or the death of a loved one? Violence and injustice in our country and world? Financial difficulties? Relational issues? Unanswered prayer? A sense of God's absence? An ongoing struggle with serious sin or addiction? As we live through these realities, Jesus invites us to get out of the boat of our self-sufficiency, and in faith, walk toward Him on the stormy seas. As we keep walking towards Him, powerful and beautiful changes gradually began to take place within us. We are better able to bear our pain with a deepened spirit of faith, hope, and love. In a spirit of compassion, instead of anger, we begin to pray for the healing and renewal of the world. We experience a growing trust in God's faithfulness and providential love. We have a growing faith that our prayer is not in vain. We come to realize that God answers our prayer. It just may be in a manner or timetable that is contrary to our personal preferences and expectations. We begin to experience Jesus as our Savior and Deliverer.

Most of the time, these changes in perspective, brought about by faith, will come like the “tiny whispering wind” as described in our first reading from the Book of Kings. They will often be subtle, ordinary, and uneventful. As time unfolds, we quietly begin to see and respond to the challenges of life with new eyes and a new heart. Instead of freaking out like we did in the past, we will have the interior conviction that God holds us safely and securely in the palm of His hands, regardless of the ultimate outcome. As the storms rage around and within us, we have more of a grace-filled serenity and sense of internal equilibrium. We have the living faith that something good will come out the stormy seas that we just walked through with Jesus.

Faith is not just the acceptance of dogma and doctrine. These things are important, but we cannot reduce faith just to that. It is primarily trust in the person of Jesus Christ. A trust that He is there for us with His love, grace, and power, whether or not we feel His presence or witness tangible or timely results. It is a conviction that He is always at work in our hearts and lives, as well as in the world around us. May the Lord give us the faith to see and the heart to celebrate all the good things that He is doing for us, as we begin to really unleash our faith.

I don't know about you, but I like stories with happy endings. I am happy to announce that I experienced full healing from the messy "Rhinestone Cowboy" debacle from long ago. While Pastor at St. Joseph Church and School, the liturgist Gwen Stuart, who worked there at the time, coaxed me into giving it another try at the school talent show. After all those years, I finally made the leap of faith and walked on the stormy seas of my fears and insecurities. With piano accompaniment to help navigate the tricky parts of the song, I nailed it! I hit a grand slam! As the crowd was cheering wild, I yelled out the words, "Redemption." I had totally redeemed myself. A living faith in God brings real redemption into our lives. Let us be willing to take the leap of faith so we can experience this redemption firsthand. May we daily get out of the boat and walk on the stormy seas of life towards Jesus, with our gaze fixed upon Him. He is calling us! He has faith in us! How will we respond?