

## Homily 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

'How stunningly powerful is our Gentle Loving God!'

It's amazing the little stories of deep wisdom you remember from primary school. Our school reading book, when I was about 8 years old, had a tale about a bet between the wind and the sun as to who could remove the overcoat from an old man as he walked along the street. The wind began to blow but the old man only tightened his coat and drew it closer to his body. The wind blew a storm but again could not remove the old man's coat as he tightened his belt. It was now the turn of the sun. Its gentle rays caressed the man and as its warmth increased the old man loosened his belt and eventually removed his coat to enjoy the heat of the day.

Our God is a bit like that. Elijah, the prophet, in today's First Reading doesn't find God in the storm, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire but in the low whisper of the gentle breeze! Our God is a God who is lowly and humble of heart who quietly enters our lives with love, reassurance, mercy and compassion. As the Responsorial Psalm proclaims our God is a God who 'speaks of peace for his people and his faithful. In him mercy and faithfulness have met; justice and peace have embraced.'

In today's Gospel from St Matthew, Jesus even amid a raging storm, approaches the disciples calmly and gently and urges them to fear not. Whilst the disciples in the endangered boat panic, fret and complain, Jesus walks quietly on the troubled waters. "In the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.'" The faith of the disciples was still weak and instead of being relieved that Jesus had come to them, in their despair they doubted and thought he was a bad spirit. Even Peter doubted him, 'Lord, IF it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' To this Jesus replied, 'Come'. Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water. However, terrified by the raging storm he doubted and began to sink. Yet even in Peter's moment of doubt, Jesus calmly and gently stretches out his hand and takes hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, WHY did you doubt?"

This incident took place well into the public ministry of Jesus. The disciples had witnessed already many signs and wonders and, as students of The Rabbi, they had learned from his wise teachings. However, were they still fair-weather friends, their faith found wanting as soon as life got a little rough? They didn't believe, amid the storm, Jesus could calmly and gently enter their troubles and save them. Even Jesus' confident and gently reassuring invite to Peter to come to him across the water dissipated when the storm increased in ferocity and he began to drown.

I am a bit like Peter and the other disciples. Having received that great gift of faith from God, I am trusting and try to be faithful to The Gospel. However, as soon as things in life get a bit iffy and outcomes unpredictable, I tend not to recognise Jesus' presence in The Sacraments. The beauty of Creation and the support of people and events as he gently enters my life offering me his calming and gentle reassurance. Like Peter, I am so weak and lacking in faith that I even barter with Jesus, 'Lord, IF it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' As I begin to ride the storm I doubt but as I sink beneath the waves of my troubles Jesus calmly and gently offers me his outstretched saving hand. It is in the calm and gentle offering of that hand that Jesus has the final gentle saving word.

In the gentle reassuring words of the great medieval female mystic Julian of Norwich, Jesus tells us, 'All will be well all manner of things will be well.' How stunningly powerful is our gentle loving God!