

Confronting Fears

When I was about 5 years old, I remember taking swimming classes for the first time. The water was fun, but that pool seemed huge. In the shallow end where I entered though was the safety of the water not being deep, and also the security of the wall that was the side of the pool that I could hang on to. Above in the bleachers was my mom also watching me, and also some other kids in the group and a swimming instructor. At first it sure seemed difficult to let go of the side of the pool and go further out. Fear overwhelmed me. But with a bit of coaxing, I remember holding onto a floating board, and getting some help from the instructor, and making my way to the middle of the pool.

It's certainly not the only time there has been fear. As the years went by, there was the fear of riding a bike without training wheels; some fearful things at school (I still find math very scary!); fearful things in parishes that I've had to confront with a staff person or parish issue; or even some fearful things with health. Currently, there's a bit of fear with the unknown with respect to Covid and when will it end, fear of how smoothly the upcoming school year will be, maybe some fear of how elections will turn out. We all have fears. And fear can snowball and build on itself. That is unless we confront it.

This week's Gospel has Jesus walking on water. Peter gets out of the boat and says if it is you Lord, bid me to come to you. Jesus invites Peter to come, and he makes it a short way before fear gets the best of him, and he begins to sink. Asking for help, Jesus quickly pulls him out of the water and asks him why he doubted.

Say what you want about Peter, but at least he had the courage to get out of the boat. His faith will wax and wane, like the others, but ultimately their faith will be strengthened as they overcome their fears, all of them suffering greatly for the Gospel, many of them suffering martyrdom.

For ourselves, it's worth looking at the fears in our lives too.

On the one hand, there's nothing wrong with a healthy fear of something. We do not want to act irrationally. But sometimes, we can ruminate over a fear and it can take on a life of it's own, or we can ignore something without confronting it.

Fear of death is certainly understandable. Peter may be thinking about that when he realizes he's in the deep water. But sometimes we put death out of sight and out of mind. Death comes for us all, but we must remember that death is not an end, but a crossing over and that Jesus journeys with us. He, God Himself, dies, but also triumphs over death as do we. When that moment comes, God will stand with us.

Fear of failure is another thing we can battle. Maybe Peter is thinking he has failed Jesus by not trusting. Odds are he was thinking this after he denied Jesus. But Peter will be emboldened to preach and heal in the name of Jesus and lead the Church. He'll go forth, despite his shortcomings, knowing God is with him. We will fail many times; as Thomas Edison said, I have not failed 10,000 times, I've successfully found 10,000

ways that will not work.” We can learn from our mistakes and failures too, but not if we don’t try.

Sometimes we can be fearful of being dependent on others. Peter had to ask for help. So, too, do we. Asking for help though can be difficult. We can be reluctant to admit when we are hurting, or battling something or in pain. God puts us in a community though - “social distancing” is not how it’s supposed to be, nor is “emotional distancing” how it’s supposed to be. So, fear not asking for help.

Perhaps you are fearful of change. Why can’t the other disciples get out of the boat? Change though is essential for spiritual growth. God will come along and encourage us to try something new, or maybe our conscience is telling us it’s time to get serious about tackling a sin we have ignored. Be open to the promptings of the Spirit to make needed changes in life.

Through this all, is God, who is there to calm the storm. So let us listen to Him, taking a page from Elijah in the first reading where he hears God in the silent whisper of the wind in the cave. These are stormy times in our lives with so much uncertainty and stress. So let God take the wheel, and trust that He will help you find the way through the storm to the shores of the heavenly kingdom, and be not afraid.

God bless,

Fr. Paul