

Gospel: Matthew 14:22-34

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Last week we spoke of how our Lord prepared His disciples to witness His fearful, yet glorious, Passion and Crucifixion by revealing to them a portion of His divine majesty on Mount Tabor. We saw how the uncreated Light which shown from Him on Tabor burned an image of His splendor into the disciples memory, so that when they would behold Him upon the Cross they would recall the memory of Tabor and realize that the Crucified One is also the Lord of glory. And in this light they would proclaim to the world that He is truly the Radiance of the Father.

In today's Gospel reading we find ourselves a bit earlier in the Lord's earthly ministry but in the same context of preparation for the His Saving Passion.

The similarities between this Gospel reading and the events of Holy Week are striking. The events of today's Gospel account come immediately after the Lord divided the five loaves and two fish among the five thousand. This multiplication of loaves and the feeding of the five thousand was an image of the Divine Eucharist – which was instituted by the Lord at the Mystical Supper on the evening of Holy Thursday, the night before He was given up, or as we say in the Divine Liturgy, the night in which He gave Himself up for the life of the world.

And so today's Gospel reading begins, when Christ, having fed the five thousand, told the disciples to cross over the sea, as He sent the multitudes away and went up alone into a mountain to pray. The Gospel account doesn't say what the Lord prayed about. But to be sure, He wasn't praying for Himself, for as God He needed nothing. Rather, He, like in the Garden of Gethsemane, offered prayer for the world, and especially for His disciples who were in the midst of temptation. During this night they were being tossed about by the waves of the sea, and during His Passion they would be tossed about by the trials and temptations of the world's darkest hour.

So in the Gospel account, we see the disciples on the Sea of Galilee during the middle of the night being tossed about by the wind and waves. And they were fearful because they were alone, their Lord was not with them in the boat.

Undoubtedly the disciples remembered how not too long ago they found themselves under similar circumstances, being tossed about by the waves of the sea, and how Christ rebuked the winds and immediately the storm ceased and the waves became calm. But this time, their Lord was not in the boat, He was more distant from them, He was alone up on the mountain where they could not see Him and directly appeal to Him for help.

Let us pause for a moment to consider the progression in the disciples' training. Let us notice how the Lord was leading His disciples to greater and greater challenges, and thereby to greater and greater faith. The first time the disciples encountered the stormy

sea He was in the boat with them sleeping, and now this time He is apart from them on a mountain, and then later at His Crucifixion He will be separated from them by death – a seemingly permanent separation. In each instance, the Lord appears to be further and further away from His disciples when they need Him most.

Yet, in all three cases the Lord was not only aware of the disciples difficult predicament, but He was watching them and leading them to an ever deeper trust in Him. In the first case He awoke from sleep, and today He came to the disciples walking on the water, and then after His Resurrection He appeared to them through closed doors after He had risen from the dead.

When the disciples saw a figure walking on the waves of the sea they became even more frightened because they thought they were seeing a ghost. But then Christ said to them, “Be of good cheer it is I.” Likewise, after His Resurrection, when He appeared to the disciples they were afraid and thought they were seeing a ghost, but Christ said, “Be not afraid, it is I Myself, feel my hands and my feet for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Now, Peter, seeing the Lord walk on water and hearing His greeting, grew bold and said, “Lord if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water.” And Christ said, “Come.” And to the astonishment, and perhaps envy of the other disciples, Peter began to walk on the water to the Lord.

But unfortunately, this man, who in comparison to us had such great faith, took His eyes off the Lord and began to sink. And in so doing, he foreshadowed his own denial of the Lord, to whom he had sworn saying, “Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!” But as we know, Peter, having shown such great boldness, took His eyes off the Lord and faltered, denying Him three times. Yet in both cases, the Lord raised Peter up, first from the water with His mighty hand and then from the depths of his denial through repentance.

Brothers and sisters, let us learn from the way the Lord trained His disciples 2,000 years ago, for He trains us today in the very same way.

How often have we encountered difficulty in our lives? How often, when we have undergone trials, temptations, misfortunes, and sorrows, have we questioned, “Where is the Lord? Why is God allowing this to happen to me?”

We know from experience that sometimes the Lord immediately rebukes the winds and calms the stormy sea of our life. Yet at other times, the Lord allows the storm of temptations to continue so that He could call us to Himself, walking on the water, overcoming the power of this world through faith in Him. And still at other times, the Lord allows us to undergo days of utter darkness, which seem to us as our own personal Great and Holy Friday. But we know that not only does He never allow us to undergo a temptation that is too great for us, but He also never allows us to go through crucifixion without assurance that resurrection will follow, for we know that after every Great and Holy Friday, there is a Paschal Sunday.

Brothers and sisters, not only is the Lord always present and always watching when we undergo temptations, but He is also always leading us to greater and greater trust in Him. And if we let Him, He will continue to lead us until our faith is so great that we know without a doubt that He has power over all things even death itself. So that in the end, when we have crossed the stormy and tempestuous sea of this life, and the wind of temptations has ceased and the waves of worldly trials are calmed, we will rest in the port of the Kingdom of God, and together with the disciples we will cry out to Christ, who alone overcomes all, "Truly, You are the Son of God!"

To Him be the glory, together with His eternal Father, and His all-holy good and life-creating Spirit, always now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!