

9th Sunday of Pentecost

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!

In today's Gospel reading we heard the famous and miraculous account of how the Lord walked on water on the Sea of Galilee. This event immediately followed the miracle of the multiplication of loaves which we heard in last week's Gospel where our Lord fed more than five thousand men, women, and children with just five loaves and two fish.

In both of these accounts we see two things. We see the Lord revealing His divine power and we see the Lord incorporating His disciples into His miracles and ministry.

In last week's Gospel the Lord showed His power by multiplying the loaves and fish, and then the Lord incorporated His disciples into the miracle by having them distribute the loaves and the fish to the people. And in this week's Gospel, the Lord showed His divine power by walking on the water, on the Sea of Galilee, and then He incorporated His disciples into the miracle by allowing the Apostle Peter to get out of the boat and come to Him on the water.

Now the Lord did these things for two reasons. First, to show His power as God. And secondly, in order to prepare His disciples for their future ministry. For the Lord not only taught the disciples but He also trained them, as a sort of spiritual internship, a spiritual internship which would prepare them to continue His ministry on earth after He had ascended into heaven.

When the Lord multiplied the loaves, He was preparing His disciples to lead the celebration of the Eucharistic meal, to become officiates at His Divine Supper, to distribute His Holy Body and Blood to the people. Listen to the text of last week's Gospel:

"[The Lord] commanded the crowd to sit down on the grass. And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to Heaven He blessed and broke, and gave the loaves to His disciples. And the disciples gave to the crowd. And they all ate and were filled. And they took up twelve hand baskets full from the fragments that remained."

First, we see the miracle showing the Lord's power, and then the incorporation of the disciples into the Lord's ministry. First, the Lord blessed and multiplied the loaves and then He gave the loaves to His disciples to distribute to the people. And after all had eaten there were twelve baskets remaining – the number twelve foreshadowing that this bread, the Bread of Life, was to be taken by the Twelve Apostles into all the world as spiritual nourishment.

This miracle foreshadowed that which occurred in the Mystical Supper and which does continue to occur even to this day in the Divine Liturgy when we recite how the Lord took bread into "His holy, pure, and blameless hands; and when He had given thanks

and blessed it, and hallowed it, and broken it, He gave it to His holy disciples and apostles saying: Take! Eat! This is My Body which is broken for you, for the remission of sins.”

In all three cases, the feeding of the 5,000, the Mystical Supper, and the Divine Liturgy we see that the Lord accomplishes the miracle and then distributes the bread to His disciples so that they might eat of it themselves and also assist in the distribution to the people. This is because the disciples needed to be fed and nourished themselves before they could undertake their ministry to help and feed others.

This is true in the educational sense as well for the Lord first taught and instructed His disciples before sending them out to teach and preach to the people – that is first the Lord’s followers became disciples, and only then His apostles.

And this reveals an important truth about the spiritual life – that first we are called to learn the ways of Christ and be nourished by His teaching, and only to be sent out to share His teaching and spiritual nourishment with the world.

This is so we can learn to acquire for ourselves what we hope to pass on to others. Otherwise, not only will we be rejected as people who haven’t learned to practice what we preach, but the Lord’s message will also be rejected because it will seem powerless, as something unable to change even the lives of those who claim to follow it.

Now, this transformation from discipleship to apostleship, from one who learns to one who is sent, was perhaps no where more apparent than in the case of St. Peter, the first of the Lord’s followers.

We’ve already said that the Lord incorporated His disciples in His miracles so that He could prepared them for their future ministry. And that for this reason, when the Lord walked on the Sea of Galilee, He also permitted the Apostle Peter to walk to Him.

But how exactly did walking on water help prepare the Apostle Peter for his future ministry? How exactly did this event help transform St. Peter from being simply a disciple of the Lord to one of His foremost apostles?

We know that, St. Peter, as the chief disciple of the Lord, was accustomed to hearing the Lord’s teaching and listening to His instruction. The Gospels even record that St. Peter often put his own boat out on the Sea of Galilee so that the Lord’s voice could carry over the waters to the crowds. In this St. Peter proved to be a true disciple, one who not only listened to and studied the words of the Lord, but one who also loved His teacher.

But on this night, on the Sea of Galilee, the Lord was to offer a different type of teaching. The Lord was to teach St. Peter and the other disciples what it would take for them to be transformed from disciples to apostles, from hearers of the Word to doers of the Word.

And for this lesson, the setting needed to be different. The water could not be calm and the sky clear as it often had been when the Lord taught from the boat on the Sea of

Galilee. Instead the water needed to be rough and the sky stormy. And it couldn't be during the day, it had to be at night and during the fourth watch. This was the setting the Lord chose for this important lesson of faith. And He did this because faith must be practiced especially when we are challenged and confronted by fear.

The Gospel account says that when the Lord approached His disciples walking on the stormy sea, He called to them saying, "Be of good cheer. It is I. Do not be afraid." And then St. Peter respond, "Lord, if it is You, allow me to walk to you on the waters." And the Lord said to Peter, "Come!" Then the Gospel says, and this is important, "And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus."

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Here is the moment of training for future ministry that we alluded to, here is that key lesson in the spiritual internship that we are talking about. Because in the getting out of the boat and walking on the water to Jesus, St. Peter was undergoing an important transformation, he was growing spiritually, he was acting upon his faith, he was starting to put the teaching he had received into practice, and by doing so he started to see the power of faith in Christ.

It is this ability to put one's faith into practice which makes it possible for a disciple to become an apostle. Disciples learn the ways of God, they are beginners in the spiritual life, but Apostles practice them and through faith in Christ are able to do the miraculous, to walk on water, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and by doing so to convert unbelievers to Christ. This is why they are sent – because they have made the spiritual leap from sitting in the boat and listening to the Lord to getting out and walking on the water; they are people of action, people spiritually equipped to do the work of the Lord.

This is the lesson which the disciples were taught that night on the Sea of Galilee. For the Lord was revealing to them that they needed to be willing to get out of the boat, to face the challenges and adversities which life would bring them, and to go against all odds in order to draw closer to Him.

The time was coming when their Lord would be taken from them, just as that night He wasn't in the boat with them. And when this time would come, they would need, more than ever, to be able to act upon their faith. They could no longer simply be hears of the Word, but they also needed to be doers and preachers of the Word – they needed to act on their faith themselves if they were ever going to be able to share it with others.

And if they were willing to be like St. Peter and come to the Lord against all odds, they would not fail, they would not sink, they would not be overcome by the storms of life, whether it be persecution, temptation, or anything else. Instead they would overcome everything and draw near to the Lord, as if walking on water. And if their faith grew weak, then the Lord would reach out and save them, extending His hand to them as He had done to Peter.

Brothers and sisters, just as the Lord was training the Twelve to be transformed from disciples to apostles, from hearers of the Word to doers of the Word, so too is He training us.

The Lord calls each of us to learn His ways and to share in His Supper, to receive His instruction through His words and His divine nourishment through His Body and Blood. But He also wants us to share these things with all of mankind, with our families and friends, and with everyone we come in contact with. This was the meaning of the Twelve baskets being left over. The Lord has given us more than we ourselves need, and none of it must go to waste. Instead the good things of the Lord must be shared, and we are called to be those who share them.

But to do this we have to be willing to spiritually get out of the boat, to face the stormy sea and to do the unthinkable, to do what seems so impossible, to live our faith and to share it with the world. It will not be easy, just as it was not easy for St. Peter to get out of the boat and to walk on the water, but it is possible because this is the Lord's will for us.

The Lord is calling us to act upon our faith and to make that transformation from being His disciples to becoming His apostles. Let us not shrink back when the storms arise in our lives, but let us see these storms as opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation.

Finally, brothers and sisters, let us be like the Twelve disciples. Let us be taught so that we can share Christ's teaching, let us be nourished so that we will be strong enough to help nourish others, and let us get out of our spiritual boats, our comfort zones, and act upon our faith so that we can truly become the Lord's apostles to the world.

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

Glory to Jesus Christ!