

The gospel reading today tells the story about Jesus calming an angry sea. We know the story occurred during the evening. The Bible suggests that the storm came up suddenly; probably the disciples were caught in a severe thunderstorm at night. They were terrified. We can understand this. If you've ever lived by the ocean, or even a good-sized lake, you know what a severe thunderstorm can do. The winds are very strong and the sea build with incredible rapidity. A small boat is at great risk.

The gospel story tells us that Jesus calmed the angry winds. We are not surprised when we read this account because the Gospels are filled with stories about the miracles of Jesus. The problem is that we have heard them to a point that we often take them with a grain of salt. So in hearing them, we are tempted to not pay close attention and we miss the details. There is a very important detail in the story this morning that slips past almost everyone. But, St. Mark's whole purpose in telling this story about calming the stormy sea is to get us to this almost forgotten point. "Who is this," Mark tells us the disciples asked, "that even the wind and the sea obey him?" This should be our question, as well, because the question is fundamental. The question is who is Jesus, who is this that we are asked to accept in faith? Who is this that expects our trust as well as our love? The Church gives us an answer. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. But, reciting the answer and expressing faith by the answer are different things. You can learn stock answers from books and teachers and plain old indoctrination. Faith is never built on stock answers. Faith comes from experience. Faith comes from living and walking with God day in and day out, and trusting God with the problems of life. Faith is a living thing and faith accumulates and strengthens with experience.

As we experience Jesus, we come to know him. Openness to the experience of the Savior enables us to encounter him in ways that lead to trust, that lead to confidence and certainty. We discover him as God's perfect love, love so deep, so strong, and so perfect that nothing can separate us from that love. In fear and despair, we can reject Jesus, but he never rejects us. We may not be steadfast, but the Lord is always steadfast. In the most severe of life's storms, Jesus is with us. Time spent living with the Lord brings us to deeper and deeper faith in the Lord. We reach that point in which the rote answer and the faith answer are the same. Who is this that even the winds and the seas of troubled life obey him? He is Jesus the Son of God. He is the Christ, the Messiah.

The Gospel reading today tells us that we should expect prayers to be answered because Jesus cares about us. It is OK to expect prayer to be answered. Our Lord promised that whatever we asked in his name God hears and answers. In Christian theology, an answered prayer has a name. The name is "miracle." Miracles do not have to be show-stoppers. In fact, my experience is that when we experience the hand of God in the small things of life, we are far better equipped to acknowledge God in the big events of life. The disciples asked, "Who is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?" Hopefully,

we will come to the point that we know the answer with all the certainty that our souls can muster, but we will get there only by taking one step in faith at a time. *Amen.*