

It's been five months since things were normal in the Church. By that I mean that since March, due to the coronavirus, the usual practice of the faith has been disrupted – big time. What has happened to your own spiritual life and relationship with Jesus in these months of forced changes? Have faith, prayer, fervor wilted, grown? I want to think about those questions in relation to this verse of the Gospel passage.

“He [Jesus] made the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side.” It sounds like Jesus is forcing the Apostles to leave Him. There is a reluctance on their part. Some are fishermen, used to sailing, but after spending time with Jesus they want Him around. Part of the reason Jesus deliberately separates Himself from the Twelve is His desire for solitude and prayer. But there is also another lesson here. In Matthew's Gospel this is the first time the Apostles are sent off by themselves. How will they react when Jesus seems far away?

As Jesus spends the night in prayer the Apostles are facing storms. In the middle of their separation from Jesus they are “tossed about” by

the waves. The Greek word here, *basaniz-o-menon*, literally means “tortured.” Think of the early Christians and the persecution they faced at the hands of the Romans. So, this is not just a natural storm, but represents the struggles of the Church. Bishop Mueggenborg, in a commentary he wrote, makes the point that we call the main part of a church the “nave.” Nave comes from the Latin word for ship, “*navis*” (think of ‘Navy’). The Church is the Ship of Christ, the Bark of Peter, etc. And the Church holding the Apostles is being tossed about. And it’s the darkest part of the night – the fourth watch – 3:00 o’clock in the morning. Think of how alone the Apostles feel in these circumstances.

The trials that we face in life also teach us about ourselves, our faith, and Jesus. Sometimes we discover who we are, and who God is, in the darkest times, when Jesus forces us into the boat, and has seemingly abandoned us. Perhaps you are experiencing personal storms. Certainly, we are facing storms as a Church and a country. We can ask, “Where has God gone? He seems far away.”

Here let's go back to the questions I asked at the start of the homily. How has our spiritual life changed during these past five months? I've heard that people are drifting. The live-streamed mass was fine in the beginning, but now is getting a little old. Attendance is spotty. Receiving communion is infrequent. Confession has been by appointment only. The programs and small groups are meeting on-line, if at all. This coronavirus time is an experience of seemingly forced separation from Jesus – it can feel like the Apostles being told to cross the Sea of Galilee without Jesus.

But it's in this situation that Jesus comes to them, and comes walking on the water, a sign of His power and divinity! Jesus hasn't abandoned them after all. The point Jesus makes to the Apostles and us here is that, as far away as He seems, He's really near. He shows up in their darkness. "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

Today I want to share some ways Jesus wants to reappear to you with His divine power. These past several months we have limited mass

attendance to a rotation of names on a long list. You did not have a choice of mass times. You were just assigned a mass. Many couldn't attend the mass they were assigned. And it could be weeks between Sunday masses. That hasn't helped anyone's spiritual life.

Well, going forward there will be a new system in place for coming to mass. Beginning Sunday, August 9 at 3:00 PM you will be able to click on the link found at hfkparish.com and sign up for the weekend and weekday masses of your choice. One week at a time will be available for signup (for example, on August 9 you will be able to sign up for August 15 (evening) through August 23 masses. The signup process is quick and simple. If you need help call the parish office. There will still be limits on how many people can come to each mass. It's first come, first serve. And you will still be checked off a list when you come to the church door. And the weekday masses this coming week are still going to be according to the old list method. And just a reminder – the Archbishop has still dispensed us from Sunday mass

obligation – and the live-streamed masses will continue. Be safe and prudent if you are vulnerable or uncomfortable with coming to mass.

But I hope this new system will lead to an increase in attendance going forward for those who wish to attend.

We will also be adding another day of scheduled confessions this week. There will now be confessions every Thursday morning from 9:30 – 10:30 in addition to Wednesday and Friday mornings, and Saturdays from 3:00 – 4:00. And we are thinking of other ways to reveal Christ's continued presence to us in this storm, such as offering opportunities for Eucharistic adoration again. The purpose of all this is to get all of us to remember Jesus really is close to us, even in the time of the pandemic disruption. He hasn't abandoned us.

But some of this is also on us individually. This isn't an easy time to grow in faith, but that is what Jesus wants. It's what He always wants. And He doesn't ask the impossible. We can do this. We need to take responsibility for our religious practices and make new routines.

“He made the disciples get into the boat,” is a good description of how we feel when life (God) has compelled us – against our wishes - to enter into a situation where we’re in the dark. But there is opportunity here. When we are tested, we can grow. Faith either fades away or it develops strength in the dark times. Which will it be for each of us? How has it gone so far these past months? What do you need to change to regain the calm? Whatever it is, Jesus is still there beside you to help.