

When we read scripture we can interpret it in many ways to arrive at a better understanding of its meaning. We refer to these ways as senses. They are summed up by a Latin saying. I will spare you the Latin but it translates to “The Literal speaks of deeds; Allegorical to faith; The Moral how to act; Anagogical our destiny.”

In the allegorical sense, the Gospel reading today tells us much about our faith as we make our way in this world.

The Sea of Galilee is notorious for its storms. The geography of the area makes storms fairly common. For the followers of Jesus, some of whom were fisherman, to be afraid for their lives because of a storm, suggests that this was much more than the harsh weather they were used to.

Mark was writing to the early Christian Church in Rome, a persecuted and frightened Church. All around them the world pressed in on all sides, trying to dismiss their faith as irrelevant. The prevailing culture of paganism told them they were out of step with the times and their ideas of how a society should be, were not welcome. Some of the faithful even paid with their lives for following Jesus. To help comfort the members of the Church, Mark relates the story of Jesus and His disciples in a boat during a storm. Because of its depth and mystery and uncontrollable nature, the sea was an ancient symbol of chaos and destruction. The boat is also an early symbol; it represents the Church. And the Church St. Mark was speaking to was a boat sailing through a stormy sea in danger of being swamped by the waves.

In the year 2000 a movie was released titled “The Perfect Storm,” about a group of fishermen weathering a confluence of a cyclone and a hurricane that came together to form a second hurricane, a perfect storm.

We have our own perfect storm here in the world today. We have a storm in the state government as progressives and conservatives fight over the best path to lead the country forward. We have a storm in our society as programs are introduced that threaten to bring about the very things they seek to eliminate, racism, hate, and bigotry. And we have a storm within the Church as we try to find a balance between those who want to preserve tradition and those who want tradition to take a back seat to a more worldly outlook.

Together these three storms in State, Church, and society, come together to form a kind of ideological perfect storm. The ship of the Church, the Bark of Peter, is tossed about by the waves created by this storm.

And all this time, it may seem to us that God is asleep. Does He not care that we are dying?

I was listening to a webinar recently on the Trinity. The presenter, a very accomplished sister, began her comments on the first person of the Trinity by saying “God the Father, if you're comfortable with that language.”

Why have so many of us become uncomfortable with calling God, Father? Why do we call God Father? Why do we call priests Father? In the eastern Catholic rite, even deacons are called Father Deacon. Why are the most visible servants of the Church men?

The truth is that the relationship between a mother and her children is different from that of a father and his children.

I once saw a child who was just learning to walk. She tottered around on shaky legs and at one point she fell. It was obvious she wasn't hurt because she sat there on the ground looking around her. Only when she noticed that her mother was watching her did she start to cry at the top of her lungs.

When we fall it is mothers who rush to us, pick us up, comfort us and console us. That is the role of mothers. But fathers are different. When we fall, fathers wait, they may even try to stop our mothers from rushing to us. Fathers wait to see what we will do. Will we cry for help or will we pick ourselves up and keep going? Fathers allow us to fall so that we may learn who we are. And when the time is right, then fathers swoop in and pick us up, not to soothe and comfort us, but to protect and guide us.

Why does God allow suffering in the world? It is a great mystery of our faith. Perhaps second only to the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Why does God allow not only these great storms in the world that threaten the lives of innocent people, but also the personal storms we weather in our lives on a daily basis? It may be the long painful sickness of a loved one, or the death of a beloved child. It may be damage caused by a family member's addictions or infidelities, financial ruin or even heart breaking loneliness.

The Catechism tells us that in this life we cannot fully know the ways of God, but that He would not permit evil if He could not bring some good from it in ways that we shall fully know only in eternal life.

Even so, we can understand these mysteries partially, if we understand God's plan for our lives.

We were not promised that our brief time in this world would be marked by comfort and unbroken pleasure. We were not promised that we would never fall. God wants us to achieve wisdom, joy, courage, and spiritual maturity. He wants us to become saints, worthy of the world that is yet to come. And that involves learning to trust in Him more than in ourselves, learning that we are not all powerful.

That is difficult for us because it goes against our nature, which we have inherited from Original Sin. The nature that tells us we can have it all, we don't need to sacrifice, and we don't need God, it's all about us.

Our scientific advances promise us that world. A world without storms, a world where we no longer fall, a world where “we will be like gods.”

But it is a lie. In spite of all of our great achievements there is still much we cannot do. We are limited creatures standing in the light of our creator. Science cannot eliminate the evil that seduces the vulnerable into acts of terror and violence. And like the children we are, when we get in trouble or get in over our heads, we run to the Father for help.

And of course, He will help us. For His love is everlasting. But like any Father He does not necessarily give us everything we ask for as soon as we ask for it. He does not come to our help the instant we call upon Him. How would we grow strong then? What would we learn from that? Sometimes we do indeed fall in order to learn to pick ourselves up again. The Father knows what is best for us.

God allows us to fall, He allows evil in the world, and He allows the storms to rage in our lives so that we may learn who we are. And sometimes it seems that He is asleep so that we may learn the truth that is written in our hearts, that in spite of all of our advances, there are things we cannot control, and in the end we are dependent on Him.

But alongside of this, evil is still at work in our lives. God sends us storms to test us, but it is the devil that uses those storms to tempt us, and prey upon our doubts and insecurities and make us fearful.

I frequently remind people that God has a plan for each one of us, The devil has a plan for each one of us as well. The devil wants to prevent us from fulfilling our destiny, he wants to stop us from achieving the purpose God has for us. And so while God may use the storms in our lives for good, the devil uses them for evil.

So how do we weather the storms in our lives? How do we learn to trust in God as we journey through these dark waters and reject the seductive voice that tells us to be fearful for our lives?

Our strongest weapon is prayer.

When the apostles went to Jesus in the back of the boat to wake Him up with the words, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" That is prayer. And what is Our Lord's response? He does not rebuke them for coming to Him, He rebukes them because they are afraid. "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?"

Prayer strengthens our faith. It is through prayer that we come to learn of God's greatness. Saint Mark is careful to tell us that Jesus stilled both the

wind and the waves, because He is Lord of Heaven as well as Earth. Faith helps to protect us against the workings of the demonic in our lives that make us afraid.

Until the time when God comes to calm the storm, what is required of us is faith. Intense crisis demands intense faith. What is required in the face of life threatening persecution is nothing short of heroic faith. Those disciples who are content to let Jesus sleep through the storm, even if it means going down with Him, demonstrate heroic faith. It is the faith of the martyrs. Though they would love for God to save them, they are nevertheless prepared to die with Him if He so wishes.

We are not the old creatures we once were, stumbling around in the dark and the storm, afraid for our lives. We are new creatures in Christ, and we are unafraid, because He is with us. We must have faith to trust Him and realize that we are not as powerful as we think we are.

The challenge for us is to believe even when the sun is not shining, to believe in Jesus even to the point where we are willing to let him sleep in the boat trusting in his goodness and greatness, while the storm rages on.

The question Jesus asked of His followers, still hangs in the air for us to answer, "Do we not yet have faith?"