

## Do We Desire Tranquility and Peace?

Both the reading from the Book of Job and the Gospel according to Mark demonstrate the power God has over the winds and the seas. It is God alone who fashioned all of the intricacies of creation and by his power and might sustains life in all things. Both of these readings can certainly provide us with a wonderful meditation on God's omnipotence, but they also contain some pearls of wisdom for our personal spiritual lives as well.

The basic element of water has always held great significance within the Judeo-Christian tradition. The parting of the waters of the Red Sea, the waters of the great flood, the purifying waters of Baptism and the image of the church as a "boat" on the sea of life are all relevant images of how God communicates and relates with his people. Peering into the endless depths of the sea can easily be likened to peering into the endless depths of the human soul.

Many retreat houses around the world are located on bodies of water, especially the ocean. As people gaze out upon the sea one's place within the universe is easily pondered and the wonders of creation unfold. The ebb and flow of the tides provide a concrete image for seeing the work of the Holy Spirit in our own personal lives and the life of our world. The tranquil sound of waves gently breaking on the shore brings a deep sense of inner peace and quiet. We can readily experience that everything truly rests in God's hands.

Conversely, the experience of the ocean or water during a storm paints a much different picture. The disciples witnessed this first hand in today's Gospel. Experiencing the sea at its worse teaches us very quickly just how vulnerable and dependent we are. We can feel powerless, out of control and frightened at the thought of being overwhelmed or destroyed by nature. Experiencing our fragility is something most of us would rather avoid. When we do experience our fragility, however, we can be taught incredible lessons about identity and life.

Even though an ocean storm can teach us as much about who we are as the ocean's calm, one who lives by the sea may favor the latter over the former. When a fisherman has his or her boat on the sea, a calm environment is more conducive to success than a turbulent one. A tranquil and clear sea allows for greater vision.

Diadochus of Photice, a bishop in the twelfth century, reflects on the spiritual life using this very image. He states, "A tranquil sea allows the fisherman to gaze right into its depths. No fish can hide there and escape his sight. The stormy sea, however, becomes murky when it is agitated by the winds. The very depths that it revealed in its placidness, the sea now hides. The skills of the fisherman are useless."

The disciples in today's Gospel desired tranquility and peace. They insisted that Jesus calm

the sea and restore order. Each of us desires that very same tranquility and peace. Each of us must try to provide the Holy Spirit with a resting place. What prevents us from experiencing the very tranquility and peace we desire?

Our lives can become very turbulent. The schedules we keep, the priorities we establish and anxiety are just some of the things that can cause unrest. As human beings, we tend to seek happiness in things and circumstances outside of ourselves rather than within. Who among us does not find him or herself wondering if a large jackpot lottery would bring contentment? Or, how often do we find ourselves pondering whether we made the right choices or whether our vocation or profession is the one we are meant to have?

We complicate our lives by looking in all of the wrong places for the peace we desire and in doing so, our vision becomes murkier than it does clear. We do not see the wisdom in losing ourselves in God and truly allowing him to be the guide and director of our lives. We think we have a better way or that a half hearted consideration of God is better than none at all. We are anxious, worried and preoccupied because we have built our lives and their meaning on things that can be taken away rather on things that cannot. We spend more time worrying about how we are going to provide for our needs rather than seeing how God already is doing this for us. We can learn a lesson from the simple animals who share life with us. They go about their business free of worry with simple goals and care free ways. Their lives are a constant melody of praise to God. Do our lives give praise to God?

If we want to experience tranquility and peace, we must stop looking without and start looking within. We need to calm the waters of our lives as much as possible so that we can see clearly and plunge into the depths of our souls. It is only then and there that we will be able to create a home for the Holy Spirit and draw our strength, courage and purpose from within and not from without. If everything were taken from us tomorrow, could we still discover peace? Would we still know and believe that we have not been abandoned by God?

It is ironic using worldly philosophy, but there have been many people throughout all of history who have discovered great things when all was taken from them. Phenomenal stories are told by folks who have been imprisoned, tortured, held hostage or placed in concentration camps who found themselves more in touch with their inner spirit, God and a sense of happiness and purpose than before they had the experience.

We do not trust God enough to let go. We have become very superficial and self indulgent in our approach to life. God can calm the turbulence of our lives. He will not, however, manipulate the exterior things of our existence, but he can certainly guide us through the interior ones. If we allow him to, God will assist us in detaching from the things we think we need to the things God knows we need. This is the goal of our spiritual lives. If we succeed in our endeavor and embark upon the quest for tranquility and peace, then the holy nurturing that is brought to our souls will shine forth and our lives we be constant and

harmonious melodies of praise to God!