



Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland
Bishop Emeritus
Diocese Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

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Readings for the Twelfth Sunday of the year, Cycle B
Job 38, 1.8-11
2 Corinthians 5, 14-17
Mark 4, 35-41

The Book of Job does not appear too often as a liturgical reading. In a Mass where most of those participating are my fellow bishops I will resist the temptation to compare Job's life of turmoil with that of the average bishop. Nevertheless, I feel sure many a bishop has been tempted to cry out in prayer, if not in exasperation, "why me, O Lord?" But therein lies the message of God's long-awaited response to the pleadings of the beleaguered and suffering Job. His life is colored by a certain self-righteousness and self-importance (these were the days before psychoanalysis!). His life of internal questioning and frustration - in short, his full-blown identity crisis, is matched by an environment in turmoil. Out of the storm comes the voice of God and immediately Job's problems, human as they are, fade into insignificance when absorbed into the majestic power and presence of God's care and compassion.

Who shut within doors the sea when it burst forth from the womb? (Job. 38, 8)
God, as it were, answers his own question and continues:
Thus far shall you come but no further, and here shall your proud waves be stilled!
(Job. 38, 11)

This, of course, gives us the perfect introduction to the incident described for us by Mark in today's gospel.

Did Jesus set up this incident? Was it, as educators would say, a "teachable moment?" Even in our more sophisticated age, with all the navigational aids of satellite and electronic technology, experienced mariners still fear the sea. Its serenity can be deceptive and its unexpected change of moods - "a bad squall blew up", (Mk. 4:37) has ingrained vastly different cultures with the belief that an angry life-taking sea is in some way the personification of evil. This was certainly the position of what we might call the more ancient cultures.

It was against this background that the Lord's disciples, illustrating in their behavior some of the self-importance of Job, cried out "*Teacher, doesn't it matter to you that we are going to drown?*" (Mk. 4:39) Dare I suggest that in a special way we bishops are the successors of those terrified disciples. We need to reassure ourselves often that Jesus is always with us even when he seems silent or asleep. We need to know that when the storms are abroad we must remember that our God is Lord of the sea in its tranquility and in its restlessness. The same applies to all those ills and even attacks which beset not only the human condition but also the programs of some who delight in undermining the Church.

Allied to this realization there is a subtle call to action in today's gospel narrative.

"Let us cross over to the farther shore." (Mark. 4:35)

Here is a phrase which contains a challenge with implications for evangelization and missiology. Nevertheless it is wide enough to satisfy many personal and community interpretations. We have succeeded, with our Holy Father's leadership, in marking the coming Millennium as a new icon, a new point of departure, a clarion call for a new Pentecost. That "farther shore" beckons. The Pentecostal work of the Spirit is largely creative whether it be "a movement over the waters" as in Genesis or a "richness of understandable languages" as on the day the Church was born. In today's Mass God speaks to us, in the Book of Job through poetry and in the gospel through the all-too-human terror of sailors on a turbulent sea.

As one looks over the panoramic history of the Church it seems, again and again, that there is great validity in Newman's dictum that "*The heart is commonly reached not through reason, but through the imagination.*" In our efforts to ensure that the teachings of Christ are integrated into our society we spend a great deal of our time on cold logic, mounting legal arguments, quoting rules and regulations, seeking votes to bolster our positions. This is not wrong and at times it is absolutely necessary. There is, however, the danger of thinking that being right or winning the argument or the vote results in the recruitment of enthusiastic disciples. Indeed, it often promotes divisiveness, alienation and a "wait until next time" attitude.

If our new Pentecost is to mean anything we must change peoples' hearts, in other words, conversion. That is where the imagination comes in. There is a great famine in the Church regarding those works of the imagination which can elevate the spirit, enliven emotions and inspire convictions.

Because of other priorities have we neglected the witness value of church architecture, the captivating value of the scriptural themes as illustrated in music, poetry, art and sculpture? While it is true that those who follow Christ must be "signs of contradiction" within the prevailing culture we must also promote that which is positive and awe-inspiring. No army ever won a battle if its only qualification was a superb rearguard action. Being "good-losers" doesn't do a great deal for fulfillment. The Lord said "make disciples of all nations" and the agony is that this may include those who may think they are already disciples, and, horror of horrors, even ourselves! At one moment we have the image of a tired Jesus sleeping on a cushion in the stern of a storm-tossed fishing boat - maybe that's us - and some moments later we have all on board asking each other, "who can this be?" This must be our goal because once that question is asked grace is at work and it will lead to its inevitable conclusion.

And, in my conclusion, I want to quote for you some words which I discovered recently. They could be a theme for the Church's third Millennium. They are from a poem by T.S. Eliot, his work entitled *Choruses From the Rock*.

The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven.
The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness:
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words, and ignorance of the Word.
The world turns and the world changes,

But one thing does not change.
In all of my years, one thing does not change.
However you disguise it, this thing does not change:
The perpetual struggle of Good and Evil.
Forgetful, you neglect your shrines and churches...
Second, you neglect and belittle the desert.
The desert is not remote in southern tropics,
The desert is not only around the corner,
The desert is squeezed in the tube-train next to you,
The desert is in the heart of your brother.
Where the bricks are fallen
We will build with new stone,
Where the beams are rotten
We will build with new timbers,
Where the word is unspoken
We will build with new speech.
There is work together
A Church for all
And a job for each.

My dear friends - "Let us be ready, with Christ on board, to cross over to the farther shore".

Amen