

August 13, 2017 The Storms at Sea Homily: Brothers and sisters, several years ago, in a magazine popular with Christian evangelicals, *Guideposts*, one of the featured articles was penned by an elderly woman, Edwina Trout McKenzie. She was a survivor of what was arguably one of the greatest maritime disasters in the twentieth century, the sinking of the luxury ship, the Titanic, in 1912. Of the 2207 passengers and crew on the ship, only 710 survived the disaster at sea. She recalled for the readers the sheer panic of those in the lifeboat, of which she was a fellow passenger. The children were sobbing and many of the women were inconsolable, shrieking hysterically. Fear gripped them all. A quick thinking member of the crew, the Master of Arms, Mr. Bailey, who took command of the lifeboat, wished to ease their fears by suggesting that together they sing a familiar Christian hymn. The words of the hymn iterated the importance of a strong faith in the midst of a severe trial.

"Pull for the shore, sailors. Heed not the rolling waves but bend the oar.
Safe in the lifeboat, sailor, cling to self no more. Leave the old standard and pull for the shore"

The presence of God is greater than all the forces that threaten the life of the disciples of Jesus. In today's gospel (Mt.14:22-33), we learn that, in the midst of trials, we must stand firm in our faith and not give in to despair or be overcome by the demon of fear. For many of the church fathers, the wind and the battered boat bearing the disciples have long been taken as a symbol of the church. It is built by Christ and is steered by the Apostles. The sea represents the life of man and the instability of the visible world. The storm points to every kind of difficulty that unnerves the disciple of Christ. Only recently, the retired Pontiff, Benedict XVI lamented the loss of faith in the contemporary church and warned that she is a ship ready to capsize.

But Jesus says to us: "Take courage. Do not be afraid"(Mt.13:27). Peter let fear overcome his faith and begins to sink into the depths of the sea. He had taken his eyes off Jesus. Jesus extended his hand to Peter. It is as if he said, "Peter, with your strength, you cannot rise. Hold tight to the One who reaches down to you!"

Notice that the presence of Jesus in the boat brings calm. And even when he is not physically in their company, we are assured of his prayers. He is truly Our Savior!

Nearly a century ago, the Scotsman novelist and medical doctor, A.J. Cronin, informed his readers of how his Christian faith was once again restored. After a mining accident in the area where he lived, he was called upon to give medical assistance to those who were in need. Many of the miners were still trapped beneath the rubble and in danger of losing their life. Much to his surprise, he could hear the trapped men singing a familiar Christian hymn, "*O God, Our help in ages past*". He heard the hymn's memorable words..."O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home".

Our "boat" is headed for shore. Life, indeed, has a destination. We are safe in the "boat" because *all* things are possible for the one who believes in the promises of Christ!

Amen!