

June 21, 2015 Trust In God Homily

In the year 1875 the English Jesuit priest and poet, [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#), was requested by his superiors to write a poem in memory of five German Franciscan nuns, who had only recently perished at sea while they were in flight from their native country because of the harsh anti-Catholic laws instituted by the German Chancellor, Bismarck. Hoping to find refuge in England, the nuns instead lost their lives at sea. One survivor was an eyewitness to the Sisters final moments on their earthly pilgrimage. He found the nuns joining hands and so forming the closest of bonds only minutes before drowning. The likely superior of the small group was an extraordinarily tall nun, six feet tall, who boldly declared her faith in the face of certain death. "Be strong! Do not fear! Trust in God!" she cried. And then she uttered a closing prayer, "Christ, O Christ, come to us!" She prayed not to be delivered from death, which was inevitable, but to plead with Christ to come to them once they crossed the shore to the other side of life. Her serenity and deep faith amazed the onlookers. Her Christian witness was remarkable!

In his poem entitled ["The Wreck of the Deutschland"](#) Fr. Hopkins, recalled the incident of Jesus calming the storm (Our gospel reading today), and immortalized the sister's fate and their faith. In contrast to the disciples who, in today's reading, were scolded by Our Lord for their lack of courage and weak faith "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" (Mk.4:40), the tall nun entrusted her sisters to the hands of God.

In a letter to a close personal friend, Fr. Hopkins later wrote the following words: "Christ is present in the hour of death to all who believe. The eyes of faith see the hand of God in all events"

One of the key lessons to be learned in the account of Our Lord's stilling of the storm is the need for trust. It is interesting to note that in all of the Gospels on only one occasion (today's reading) is Jesus asleep. "Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion." (Mk.4:38). What is the significance of this fact? It is a sign of Our Lord's complete trust in God's care for him in all circumstances. One is reminded of words from the fourth psalm: "In peace I shall lie down and sleep. For you alone, Lord, make me secure".

Brothers and sisters, the early Christian community considered the boat a symbol of the church. Many times throughout history, the Church has been shaken by various storms. The mighty waves of the sea pose a significant danger to the vessel, which may sink and disappear for good. We may ask: "Where is God? Has he forgotten us? Is he asleep? Again, consider the words of the psalms: "Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake: do not cast us off forever!"

Christians should always have trust in God, even in the most terrible of storms. They can always be sure that they are safe in His hand. In our Gospel, the disciples of Jesus surely feared death, but they had an even greater fear, namely, being exposed as unworthy as His followers. How shameful that would be for all of us who claim Jesus as their savior!

Like the great poet, Gerald Manley Hopkins, let us be inspired by the extraordinary witness of the five Franciscan nuns and all those who trust in Christ, even in the direst of circumstances!

Amen.