

“To whom would we go, Lord?”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, a Soviet fishing boat was docked alongside an American Coast Guard cutter, just off the New England coast.

Inside the Soviet vessel, American & Russian officials were trying to settle a long-standing dispute over fishing practices in the North Atlantic. The conference was going well. **But**...and there's that proverbial **BUT** in life, already my friends.

BUT...that night something unexpected happened, threatening the talks. A Soviet sailor, Simas Kudirka, leaped from the Soviet deck, across 10' of water, to the American deck.

Kudirka pleaded with the Americans for political asylum. **But**...the American commander refused, a decision for which his superiors later rebuked him. The disillusioned sailor was handed back to Soviet authorities. He was returned to Russia and sent to prison.

Kudirka's imprisonment brought him face to face with despair. In the midst of his ordeal, another prisoner taught him the words to a poem by Rudyard Kipling, the great, British poet.

Kudirka said later that those words sustained him in the years ahead. An excerpt from it reads:

“If you can meet with Triumph & Disaster and treat those two imposters just the same; If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to, broken, & stoop & build them up again with worn-out tools... If you can force your heart & nerve & sinew to serve your turn long after they are gone, and so hold on, when there is nothing in you, except the will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’... Yours is the Earth & everything that's in it, &—which is more, you'll be a Man, my son!”

Time after time, Kudirka recited those words, and time after time, they gave him the strength to hold on. To make a long story short, Kudirka survived his imprisonment and is, now, a free man. He attributes his survival to the spirit of Kipling's poem. It gave him the strength to hold on when there was nothing in him except the will that said, “Hold on!”

That story dramatizes an important point in today's Gospel, which I just read to you from St. John. The disciples of Jesus were pushed to the wall. There are times in our life when we are ready to quit. There are times in our lives when we, desperately, need something to hold onto.

We see this very situation in today's Gospel. The disciples of Jesus are pushed to the wall, so to speak. Their faith in Jesus is challenged, severely, by what Jesus said earlier about giving them his body to eat. Considering his words, they knew he could only be talking about ...cannibalism!

Notice: the disciples responded to this faith-challenge in two ways.

One group finds Jesus' words too hard to take. They part company with Jesus & no longer walk with him.

Second group meets the challenge &, though still “in the dark” so to speak, they remain faithful to Jesus, trusting that, some how, they will come to understand what Jesus means. Eventually, they would understand... that he was NOT speaking ‘cannibalism’ ...but ‘Eucharist!’

NOW—why did the first group fail the challenge and the second group succeed, you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

The clue the Gospel gives us is this:

When Jesus asks the second group, **“Would you also like to leave?”**

Peter answers for them saying, **“Lord, to whom would we go?”**

When pushed to the wall, they kept their eyes, firmly, fixed on Jesus. They didn't get distracted by the **problem** posed by what Jesus had said; they fell back on their personal **faith** in Jesus.

On the other hand, the group that failed did the exact opposite. They fixed their attention **on the problem**:

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Jn. 6:52 In short, they took their eyes **off** of Jesus.

For example: The difference between fixing attention **on Jesus** and fixing attention **on the problem** stands out quite clearly in this particular episode involving Jesus & Peter.

One night, when the Apostles were out on the lake, a great storm blew up. At its peak, Jesus appeared to be walking by ...**ON** the waves.

"(The Apostles) were terrified. 'It's a ghost!' they said & screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once, 'Courage,' he said. 'It is I. Don't be afraid.'

Then Peter spoke up. 'Lord, if it really is you, order me to come out on the water to you.'

'Come!' answered Jesus.

So, Peter got out of the boat and started walking ON the water to Jesus. BUT...when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid, & started to sink.

'Save me, Lord! he cried.

At once, Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said,

'What little faith you have. Why did you doubt?' " Mt. 14:26-31

The point is this:

As long as Peter kept his eyes **on Jesus**, he was all right. **BUT**...when he took his eyes **off Jesus** and began to focus on the **problem**, **THAT'S** when he began to sink!

This leads to a practical conclusion:

We are all like Peter in the storm. There are times in our life when some storm threatens to destroy us. There are times in our life when we find ourselves sinking, as Peter did.

When these times come—**and they will**—we ought **NOT** to make the same mistake Peter did.

We ought **NOT** to take our eyes off of Jesus. To fix our attention on the storm, that is, on the **problem**, will mean being swept away by the problem or the challenge.

OR—we may think of it in terms of today's Gospel, when Jesus tells his disciples about **Eucharist**.

There will be times in life when our faith will be challenged, too, as theirs was. We may even be tempted to part company with Jesus & walk with him no more, returning to our 'old' ways.

When these times come, we must be certain not to make the same mistake some of the disciples made. We ought not to take our eyes **off of Jesus** to focus **on the problem**. We must fix our attention **on the person**: on Jesus.

I now invite you to reaffirm your faith in Jesus, as did Peter.

In your heart, join me:

**"Lord...to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life....
We believe... that you are the Holy One, who has come from God!"**

May our Almighty God, our Abba, bless you...

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.