

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Waves Breaking Into The Boat

There is something endearing and unusual about Jesus in today's Gospel: in two ways he is rather like a child.

They Took Him Into The Boat

Jesus was a landlubber, a carpenter; boatmen were relatively rare in Jewish life, because, despite having a long seaboard to their west, the Jews could never take to the sea. They found it shudderingly awful, and prayed never to have to deal with it. Fishermen, therefore, were not common people, and we might assume that Jesus had not acquired very much by way of seamanship. I think of him coming obediently aboard, and being told to sit quietly at the back, especially as there is a bit of a storm brewing.

Asleep With His Head On A Cushion

Then he does what many non-drivers do when they have every confidence in the management: he falls asleep and lets them get on with it. But the storm is more than a mere squall. In fact, it's enough to question the competence of the experienced sailors. This way of facing your limitations is enshrined in the great Ps 107: *Some went down to the sea in ships...they have seen the works of the Lord, his marvels in the deep. By his word he raised a storm-wind, lashing up towering waves; up to the sky, then down to the depths, their stomachs turned to water, they staggered and reeled like drunkards, their skill all to pieces.* Through all of this Jesus unconsciously displays perfect calm, a default condition of trust which does not falter.

All Hands On Deck

Another figure comes to mind, that of Jonah, who caught a boat for Tarshish to get away from God. In order to bring Jonah to heel, God decides to take him out of his boat, an end which he accomplishes by slapping the boat about a bit. The storm soon reveals itself as more than natural in scale, and Jonah's sailors decide to wake up their passenger and recruit him to the saving of all their lives. Jonah is disarmingly frank. *It's all because of me,* he confesses, *I'm trying to get away from God.* Being informed that the God in question is the Universal Creator, the sailors

despair of coming through alive if Jonah remains in their midst. After valiant efforts, they ask the forgiveness of whatever force is playing with them, and fairly hurl the unfortunate chap into the sea – which immediately assumes a lamb-like innocence. Then there is a swirl of water, the sound of something large slamming shut, and Jonah is carried into the deep inside a large fish.

“Master, Do You Not Care?”

The question is natural, but displays misunderstanding. We should acknowledge at once that our moments of panic are not the best times for learning truths. Jesus has the capacity to snooze infuriatingly whilst the apostolic tethers are ending all around him. But this maddening repose is in fact the very state they would have wished to share, if they could; and it is founded on the perfect trust of the Father - which they lack, and he enjoys. Once he has learned of their need, however, his response is instant and to the point; with divine authority he *rebukes the wind and calls the sea to be calm.*

O Hear Us When We Cry To Thee

We are not spiritually far from those frightened men in a boiling sea. The pattern of Jesus' death and resurrection has yet to take complete possession of our hearts and minds. This story from the Gospel stands as the invitation to persevere in trust, to take the moments of greatest challenge as the occasion of learning the greatest trust. We have set our jaw and turned our face to front, on good days, and trembled before our fears when the situation seemed to threaten us beyond our power to resist. But trustful prayer would replace both these postures with complete fitness. *Fr Philip*