

Father O'Connor's Homily for 9 August 2026
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time-A

1 Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a
Romans 9: 1-5
Matthew 14: 22-33

Today's Gospel miracle of Jesus walking on water has been the target of a lot of humor.

There was a frugal man who took a trip to the Holy Land. When he got to the Sea of Galilee he was aghast to find out that it would cost \$50 an hour to rent a boat.

"Where I live," he said, "I can get a boat for \$20."

"That may be true," the boat agent told him. "But you need to remember that the Sea of Galilee is water on which Our Blessed Lord Himself once walked."

"I'm not surprised," the frugal man said. "At \$50 an hour for a boat, it's no wonder that Jesus walked!"

In today's Gospel according to Matthew – which comes right after the feeding of the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish – Jesus "made His disciples get into a boat and precede Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowds." Why did Jesus need to make them go away?

In John's account of the feeding of the 5,000, the crowd then wanted to make Jesus their king [John 6: 15]. Some of the disciples were still thinking of Jesus in terms of earthly power, so their sticking around might have complicated matters.

Jesus also wanted some time alone to pray. After all, that is why He had come there in the first place, after hearing that King Herod had just executed John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin. And then all those townspeople suddenly showed up, looking for cures.

At last, Jesus went up the mountain by Himself to pray, and the disciples set out across the lake in the boat. A sudden storm cropped up and they were struggling against the wind and the waves.

Then "during the fourth watch of the night" – the fourth watch was between 3:00 and 6:00 AM – Jesus "came toward them, walking on the sea."

"It is a ghost," they cried out in fear.

Then Jesus said to the frightened disciples, "Take courage. It is I. Do not be afraid."

Simon Peter spoke up: “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus said, “Come.”

Peter began to walk on the water. But when he saw how strong the wind was, he became frightened. And beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus stretched out His hand and caught Peter. [I suspect Jesus had a smile on His face.] Then Jesus said to Peter, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

After they got into the boat, the wind died down. Those who were in the boat did Jesus homage by saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Simon Peter’s character comes across clearly in this Gospel passage.

Peter was inclined to act upon impulse rather than thinking things through. At the Last Supper he affirmed his loyalty to Jesus: “Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be shaken!” And Jesus replied, “I give you my word, before the cock crows tonight, you will deny me three times” [Matthew 26: 33-34].

Peter’s trouble was that he was ruled by his heart and not by his head. Yet however Peter might fail, his heart was so often in the right place. And the instinct of his heart was love.

The admirable thing about Peter is that every time he fell, he rose again. And through the lens of grace, even Peter’s failures brought him closer to Jesus. Anyone who regularly struggles with temptations of lust can find a lot of encouragement here.

As the wise saying goes: “A saint is not a person who never fails. A saint is someone who gets up and goes on again every time they fall.” With God’s merciful love, Peter’s failures only made him love Jesus all the more.

When Jesus got into the boat, the wind died down. The great truth is that, wherever Jesus is, the wildest storm becomes a calm.

Saint Francis de Sales noticed a girl going across the farmyard to draw water at the well. He also noticed that, before she lifted the filled-to-the-brim pail, the girl would always float a piece of wood in it.

One day he asked her, “Why do you do that?” She looked surprised and answered, as if it were perfectly obvious, “Why? I keep the wood floating in the center of the pail to keep the water from spilling... to keep it steady!”

Writing to a friend, the Bishop Francis de Sales told the story and added: “So when your heart is distressed and agitated, put the Cross into its center and keep it steady!”

In life, the wind is often strong. There are times when we are up against it in a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our temptations, with our sorrows, with our decisions.

It is important to remember that no one needs to struggle alone. For Jesus enters the storms of life, with His hand outstretched and, with His reassuring voice, tells us not to be afraid.

This miracle scene is far more than something Jesus did one time, long ago, in far-off Palestine. It is what He continues to do for His people when the wind is strong and the storms of life feel overwhelming.

In the hour of the disciples' need, Jesus came to them. And in our hours of desperation, we can count upon Jesus to be there and save us too.

"Take courage," He says. "It is I. Do not be afraid."