

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

As we make our way back to regular attendance at Mass and as churches open their doors to the occasional visitor anxious to pray in familiar surroundings, we all find great comfort in the sacred rituals of the Church, in worshipping God again as a community and in seeing anew so many familiar faces. None of us would be so foolish as to believe the complex stewarding, chaperoning and seating arrangements represent “getting back to normal.” Nonetheless enough of what we are familiar with is recognisable for us to feel we are back at home and that the relationship with our parish family fractured by Covid - 19 and lockdown is being restored. We derive comfort and security from finding our parish pretty much as we left it.

Our relationship with the Church, i.e. mother Church, the hierarchy, the institution, the public face of the Church is a very different matter. Many are very unsure where they stand now vis a vis the institutional Church, its administrative structures and its hierarchy. Some parishioners find it hard to reconcile being obliged to receive Holy Communion in the hand, some are puzzled by the seeming silence of Church leaders in this time of protracted crisis. And these are just two of the concerns that I have picked up, from the correspondence columns of *The TABLET* but also from conversation with a variety of parishioners.

Today’s gospel story about the storm in the Lake of Galilee has a message for those of us worried about the Church and its future. The Church is frequently depicted as a boat, the *barque* of Peter. The Church is a pilgrim people on a journey and that frequently involves setting out to sea. I spent most of my childhood and youth on the western seaboard of Ireland and used to love watching the stormy Atlantic ocean at Rosses Point. I know how rough the sea can get even without a gale force wind. We are of a generation fascinated by the maiden/last voyage of *The Titanic*. The sea and its terrors holds us all in its thrall.

Even a superficial knowledge of the Church’s two-thousand year history suggests to us that it has been pretty stormy, indeed often turbulent. At the time of the Reformation or the French Revolution, to say nothing of the persecutions of the Church by the Roman emperors or the Communists in the Soviet Empire, the Church had very rough waters to negotiate. Like the first apostles whom we meet in the story Matthew relates today, bishops, priests and laity lived in fear of their lives. Many lost their lives as martyrs. And yet, just as again in today’s story, Jesus came to the rescue. He promised to be with us to the end of time and whatever problems the Church has to confront today, whatever challenges the post-Covid world throws her way, no matter who or how many desert her, we know that Jesus is always with his Church and will bring the *barque* of Peter to a safe haven.

Father Patrick